

# ROUGH GROUND

## Ethics, Ontology and Suffering

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## ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that a person suffers when she perceives herself to be disintegrating. It has also been suggested that a person values her life, and thereby suffers less, if her life has unity, or constitutes some kind of ‘whole’. These ideas have been present in discussions of suffering and health for some time and yet their implications have not been fully explored. This is because we lack an understanding of what it is for a person to be integrated, unified, or whole. In this thesis I discuss two theories of personal wholeness. The first is a neo-Kantian theory that has been recently offered by Christine Korsgaard. The second is derived from the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza. Korsgaard’s view is that a person is whole in so far as her actions are in rational agreement with her self-conception. I argue that while Korsgaard’s theory provides a credible account of obligation and ethical discourse, it does not provide an account of value and therefore fails to explain what unites a human life. I trace this failure back to the Kantian ontology underlying her theory and explain how this separates the subject from her body and her world, and leaves ‘reasoning’ as the sole and limited means of integration. I discuss how Korsgaard’s theory can be augmented by an account of language that shows how we identify shared values through shared meanings, but conclude that this approach cannot substantially advance our understanding of personal wholeness. In the light of these conclusions I move to the Spinozistic theory. According to this theory a person is an agent continually affected by and affecting others. Value consists in a person actualising her nature as it is constituted by her relationships with those others, and a person’s life has unity as she does this. To be ‘whole’ is to enjoy one’s nature in perfect response to one’s ‘complement in nature’. In so far as a person understands her life in this way she knows herself to be eternal (as all of reality is eternal). In discussing this theory I describe the implications for our understanding of suffering and how it may be addressed. I close by indicating some of the ways that the theory might be extended in future research.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

On his death bed Wittgenstein asked the woman who had been caring for him to tell his friends that he had had a ‘wonderful life’.<sup>1</sup> There has been some debate about how to interpret these last words, partly because Wittgenstein’s life involved much pain and sadness, and lacked many of the things we tend to regard as necessary for happiness.<sup>2</sup> He had no children and never married. Three of his brothers committed suicide, and he and his remaining brother contemplated the same. He did not feel proud of his accomplishments, often did not enjoy his work, and frequently changed careers. In 1926 he resigned from his position as a school teacher immediately after knocking one of his students unconscious, having already been the subject of several complaints from parents regarding his excessive use of physical discipline. He felt such guilt over the hurt that he had caused that he returned ten years later to visit (unannounced) several of his former pupils to offer personal apologies. In 1949 he was diagnosed with inoperable prostate cancer, which was subsequently poorly managed, and he lost his mental acuity in the final years of his life. When a doctor informed him he may only have a few days left to live he replied: ‘Good!’ He died on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1951 at the age of 62.<sup>3</sup>

Though Wittgenstein’s life was marked by suffering, I nevertheless think that it is possible to interpret his last words as sincerely meant. That is, I think that there is a sense in which his life may be regarded as truly ‘wonderful’ with all of its suffering. This thought undercuts certain common notions about the relationship between suffering and the value a person places on her life. We tend to think that when a person suffers she will value her life less, and that for a life to be ‘wonderful’ it must involve little or no suffering. Wittgenstein’s example suggests that these thoughts are at least not straightforwardly true.

The idea that people may respond to suffering in different ways is not new. It has been considered in moral philosophy from various perspectives, going back at least as far as Socrates.<sup>4</sup> Many writing from within healthcare have noted the variability in the ways that different people respond to the same illness. Some have noted that certain people are able to

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, 100. Cited in Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 196

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the discussion see the preface to Kluge, *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*.

<sup>3</sup> These biographical details are available through various sources. For the definitive study see Monk, *The Duty of Genius*.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Plato, *Gorgias*.

‘cope well’ with their suffering while others in the same physical condition regard their lives as unbearable, despite the best efforts of those caring for them.<sup>5</sup>

An example of the latter is provided in Leo Tolstoy’s fictional story of the *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. This example is particularly striking because it implies a normative element in the relationship between Ilych’s life and his suffering. This point is made most explicit towards the end of the story as Ilych, knowing he will soon die, comes to the realisation that he had not ‘lived as he ought’. This thought greatly aggravates his suffering:

‘The doctor said his physical sufferings were terrible, and that was true; but even more terrible than his physical sufferings were his mental sufferings, and in that lay his chief misery.

His moral sufferings were due to the fact that during that night, as he looked at the sleepy, good-natured, broad-cheeked face of Gerasim, the thought had suddenly come into his head, ‘What if in reality all my life, my conscious life, has been not the right thing?’ The thought struck him that what he had regarded before as an utter impossibility, that he had spent his life not as he ought, might be the truth... He tried to defend it all to himself and suddenly he felt all the weakness of what he was defending. And it was useless to defend it.’

...

‘When he saw the footman in the morning, then his wife, then his daughter, then the doctor, every movement they made, every word they uttered, confirmed for him the terrible truth that had been revealed to him in the night. In them he saw himself, saw all in which he had lived, and saw distinctly that it was all not the right thing; it was a horrible, vast deception that concealed both life and death...’<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Wittgenstein, Ivan Ilych had lived a comfortable and by most measures successful life, at least up until his illness. He had married and had children, progressed in a respected career, lived in a large house, and had numerous friends and acquaintances. Yet at the end of his life he was also unlike Wittgenstein, in that he could not think of his life as ‘right’, which I interpret as also meaning not *good*, and certainly not ‘wonderful’.

If it is true that there was something ‘wrong’ about Ilych’s life, and that this increased his suffering, then perhaps the opposite is also true; perhaps Wittgenstein was able to regard his life as wonderful because there was something about his life that was ‘right’. This is admittedly an interpretation but the underlying idea is not unfamiliar. Eric Cassell in his influential discussion of the nature of suffering asserts that there is a relationship between a

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<sup>5</sup> Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 38. See also Mount, ‘Existential suffering and the determinants of healing’, 40-2.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych & Other Stories*, 127.

person's 'character' and her response to suffering.<sup>7</sup> Socrates famously went so far as to say that 'a good man cannot be harmed'.<sup>8</sup> I am not suggesting such a strong position, for I would maintain that Wittgenstein was harmed and that he did suffer. The position I am proposing is that there is a relationship between living 'rightly' or 'wrongly' and the way a person *values her life*, and hence the manner in which she suffers. In this thesis I develop an understanding of this relationship.

One could approach this relationship from several directions. An empirical approach might examine the details of individual lives, such as those of Wittgenstein and Ilych, in the hope of identifying factors that may account for the differences that have been observed. Another approach would be to analyse the nature of suffering and consider how it is related to a person's moral outlook. Alternatively, one could start with a theory of right and wrong or a theory of value (i.e. the sorts of theories typically offered by moral philosophers) and consider how these relate to suffering and personal value. This most closely describes the approach that I am taking in this thesis, though my discussion attempts to incorporate elements of all three.

The starting point for my discussion is the analysis of suffering that has been put forward by Eric Cassell. Cassell's view is that suffering is experienced by 'persons', by which he means that it is not reducible to a part or parts of the person, and that it occurs when the person 'perceives herself to be disintegrating'.<sup>9</sup> It is relieved, he says, when the threat of disintegration has passed or the integrity of the person is restored 'in some other manner'. Cassell is frequently cited in literature concerned with the nature of suffering and the role of healthcare professionals in addressing suffering. He is most often credited for showing that suffering cannot be straightforwardly inferred from a person's physical condition (this seems to be supported by the examples of Wittgenstein and Ilych). In this respect his work contributes to a broad move within medical discourse to shift the focus of healthcare professionals from the physical body to the 'whole person'.<sup>10</sup> However, little use has been made of the more positive aspect of his analysis: the claim that a person suffers as she perceives herself to be *disintegrating*. This, I suggest, is because he does not explain what it means for a person to be more or less integrated, or to perceive herself as being in either

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<sup>7</sup> 'Some people do, in fact, have "stronger" character than others and bear adversity better. Some are good, kind, and tolerant under the stress of terminal illness, while other become mean and strike out when even mildly ill.' Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *The Death and Trial of Socrates*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 32-3.

<sup>10</sup> Another pivotal work in this discussion is Engel's 'The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine', 129-136. Engels proposed the now widely used 'Biopsychosocial' model of health. There has also recently been a proposal to extend this definition to include 'spirituality'. See Sulmasy, 'A Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model of Health for End of Life Care', 24-33.

condition.<sup>11</sup> Cassell acknowledged this problem in an interview he gave to Thomas Egnew as part of a study into the nature of ‘healing’. Healing, Cassell said, means achieving ‘wholeness’, and – like suffering – it is not tied to any particular physical condition. As we might expect, this definition mirrors his definition of suffering, at least in so far as ‘integrity’ and ‘wholeness’ mean the same thing.<sup>12</sup> Yet it lacks, he admits, ‘one thing’: a specification of what it means for a person to be ‘whole’, i.e. ‘healed’, or ‘not suffering’.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Cassell’s definition of suffering has been so widely taken up suggests that it is at least in some respects accurate. There are, moreover, certain phrases in current use that seem to support it. We sometimes describe people who are distressed as ‘all over the place’, ‘falling apart’ or ‘going to pieces’. Similarly, we might tell someone to ‘pull himself together’ as a way of evincing positive resolve. Such phrases imply that the concepts of integrity, wholeness, or perhaps ‘unity’ (another related concept) are applicable to a person in a way that is linked to her overall wellbeing or ability to function. In this thesis I build on Cassell’s analysis of suffering by developing an understanding of how a person could be more or less integrated, whole or not whole, or unified or not unified. Through this understanding we arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering and of how it relates to the value a person places on her life. It also fits with and greatly extends the broad conclusions of Egnew’s study, which was based on a series of interviews with ‘experts’ like Cassell. In these interviews Egnew asked each expert of how they understood the concept of healing. Egnew identified three major themes in the responses he received: ‘wholeness’, ‘narrative’, and ‘spirituality’. After analysing these responses he concluded with the suggestion that healing could be provisionally defined as ‘transcending suffering’, and proposed that this provisional definition be a starting point for further discussion and study. The theory I develop in this thesis incorporates each of the key concepts involved in these conclusions – i.e. healing, suffering, wholeness, narrative, spirituality and transcendence – while offering a systemic analysis of what they each mean and how they are related.

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<sup>11</sup> A variant of this question can also be directed at the ‘biopsychosocial’ (or biopsychosocial-spiritual) model of health. To apply the model we need to understand how the aspects or parts of the person – the biological, psychological, social (and perhaps spiritual) – interrelate in the determination of the overall ‘health’ of the person.

<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge a slight logical slide between Cassell’s definition of suffering and his definition of healing, besides the possible distinction between integrity and wholeness. Suffering for Cassell is related to a perception, while healing is related to an actual condition. I address this distinction in chapter seven at the end of my discussion (see pages 184-5). At this point I am highlighting these apparent connections as primers to the discussion in the thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Egnew, ‘The Meaning of Healing: Transcending Suffering’, 255-62. The group was comprised of Drs. Eric J. Cassell, Carl A. Hammerschlag, Thomas S. Inui, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Cicely Saunders, Bernard S. Siegel, and G. Gayle Stephens.

A philosophical supplement to Cassell's clinically informed analysis is found in Raimond Gaita's interpretation of Wittgenstein's dying remark. Gaita argues that when Wittgenstein says he has had a wonderful life he is not providing an *assessment* of his life. He is not, in other words, reflecting on the value of his life and arriving at the 'wrong' conclusion. One would not, Gaita says, ask Wittgenstein after he uttered this remark if he would like to 'think again'. One would not propose to him that his life was *in fact* not wonderful and cite his suffering as evidence of this. In Gaita's interpretation, Wittgenstein is not delivering the result of a process of deliberation that might be answerable to such facts; he is rather expressing 'gratitude for his life considered as a certain kind of whole, as having [a] kind of unity...' <sup>14</sup> This interpretation agrees at least notionally with Cassell's view that people can regard themselves as either integrated or whole, and that this condition is related to a person's suffering or the value a person places on her life. Moreover, his view of *how* wholeness and suffering relate seems to agree with Cassell's, if in considering his life as a 'certain kind of whole' Wittgenstein is seeing himself as integrated and his suffering is thereby relieved. At this point it is not precisely clear that this is the case, or whether it is the perception of the whole, the valuing of the whole, or the whole itself that is primary; and so it is not clear how far Gaita and Cassell agree. <sup>15</sup>

Like Cassell, Gaita does not explain what it means for a person to perceive her life as a 'whole', or for her life to be more or less unified. Unlike Cassell, he offers a reason for not providing such explanations. He is convinced, in part by Wittgenstein's philosophy, that this is not the sort of explanation that philosophy can provide. There are two parts to his argument. Firstly, he points out the problem of understanding the value of unity within future experience orientated meta-ethical frameworks, which are prevalent in twentieth century philosophy. This would include any meta-ethic derived from an empiricist philosophy, and also those neo-Aristotelian approaches that ground ethics in the 'flourishing' of the individual. <sup>16</sup> Simply put, if we equate value with some feeling or state that we arrive at and

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<sup>14</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 196-7. Gaita argues that gratitude of this kind is not necessarily tied to the theological notion that one's life has been 'given' by God.

<sup>15</sup> There are several possible differences. To begin with, Gaita's view seems to imply that such an expression of gratitude is something that Wittgenstein *does*, and so is not merely a perception. Cassell does not discuss this distinction. Also, it may be argued following Gaita's interpretation that a person could value her life in this way while suffering. In other words, to express gratitude for one's life as a whole may not be the same as perceiving one's life as a whole, or actually being whole. My own view is that this kind of valuing does relieve suffering, but I cannot explain this in advance of the theories that are to be discussed. This is reviewed in chapter seven (page 181).

<sup>16</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 131-140. The neo-Aristotelian position that Gaita discusses is that of Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. One may of course regard flourishing as a kind of integration, and thereby bring the two views together. The Aristotelian conception of unity is not discussed in this thesis, but a study of this topic would be useful for the purposes of broader comparison. It may be that Aristotle does not offer a credible account of unity and that this is why Korsgaard, as she develops her discussion of the unity of

experience for a time, it is very difficult to make sense of Wittgenstein's gratitude or the value of unity as each appear to be somehow independent of both past and future. The second part of his argument is more far reaching: in his view the value of unity cannot be explained by philosophical argument because it is tied to the 'forms of goodness' that a person has witnessed.<sup>17</sup> If a person has no intuitive grasp of the goodness being described, then no amount of argument will convey its significance. Gaita's view is that philosophy can only show what is 'grammatically' acceptable, i.e. rationally or intelligibly possible. For a more substantive answer – an answer that one may personally 'commit' to – he believes we must go beyond philosophy and examine particular examples, such as Wittgenstein.

While I agree with Gaita's assessment of 20<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophies as generally unable to account for the value of unity, I do not share his view that this is a matter beyond philosophical understanding. In my view philosophical study may extend our understanding of the nature of reality in ways that enable us to grasp why certain words are intelligible and others not. Such an understanding can in turn refine our language and our thinking, and thereby increase the scope of what is intelligible to us. This is not to say that philosophy stands apart from our lives, or can operate wholly independently of what we have 'witnessed'. My view is rather that philosophy has a substantial role in forming our lives and in enabling us to understand what we witness. I will not attempt to justify that position at this point, as that would require a careful discussion of the relationship between thought and reality, for which I would need to draw on the epistemological and ontological theories that I discuss later. I will instead give a brief outline of my position by adapting the 'terrain' metaphor that Wittgenstein used to address this issue. He develops this metaphor in the following well known passage from the philosophical investigations:

'The more closely we examine actual language, the greater becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I had *discovered*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming vacuous. – We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to rough ground!'<sup>18</sup>

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the self, draws on Plato rather than Aristotle, whom she has previously used to explain action. See Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, chapter 7.

<sup>17</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, pp.135-6.

<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 51.

In this passage Wittgenstein is describing the efforts of philosophers to refine their language so that the meaning of words becomes perfectly clear (this is the ‘crystalline purity of logic’). In my case, the term that I wish to refine in this way is ‘wholeness’, or more precisely a family of terms – ‘wholeness’, ‘integrity’ and ‘unity’ – as they apply to persons. Such efforts fail, says Wittgenstein, because our words as we use them do not afford such refinement. Philosophers attempt to make them ‘pure’ by eliminating all the ambiguities of ordinary use, but in doing so they (the words) become useless. In lifting words from the context of ordinary use we move onto the ‘slippery ice’; having been stripped of their meaning they no longer ‘move us’ in the way that they ordinarily do, and hence there is no ‘traction’ (we find ourselves locked in the frigid world of definitional implication and tautology). The solution says Wittgenstein is to resist the impulse to purify our language and instead develop a clear sense of what words mean as they are ordinarily used, so that we do not fall into confusion.<sup>19</sup> This is what it means to return to the ‘rough ground’.

Wittgenstein’s analysis may well be applicable to a large amount of philosophical work. Philosophers often seem to ‘lose sight’ of the ‘non-philosophical world’ and adopt terms that seem alien, and indeed irrelevant, to the ‘real concerns’ of everyday life. However, I do not think this is true of all philosophy, and I do not accept that the best philosophy can do is describe the contours of ordinary use. Just as we develop our physical environment so that it is more conducive to human life, we can also develop our language so that it is more conducive to human thought. It is true that there will always be certain features that are, as it were, ‘immovable’. An aeroplane allows us to ‘defy’ gravity but does not alter gravity itself. Similarly perhaps, an understanding of suffering may change the way that we suffer, but it will not take away our basic vulnerability (though of course these ideas remain to be discussed). By taking account of the terms that are being used, and examining the conditions of their use, one may see more clearly what those terms can and cannot do, and where there is the possibility of developing new terms, or new uses, that are more apt to our purposes. In this way philosophy can improve our understanding and our language such that we can more easily negotiate the rough ground.

The method of philosophical analysis that I am using in this thesis is ‘metaphysical’ in that it involves fundamental conceptions of reality. My aim is to consider how certain ontological theories may improve our understanding of the concepts of suffering and wholeness in the ways just described. As with philosophy generally, there has been considerable debate throughout the history of philosophy as to the role of metaphysical

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<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 52. Confusion is, for Wittgenstein, the state of the philosopher.

theories and how they are established. I will not address this debate in detail in this thesis, beyond what has been said here about the purpose of philosophy and what is said in defence of particular ontological and epistemological propositions as they are discussed. Broadly speaking, my view is that ontology is inescapable, in that all forms of thinking about the world imply a notion of what reality is, even if these implications are only dimly perceived. As such all thought is open to rational appraisal and logical extension, i.e. ontological theory. At the same time I acknowledge that theory must always be sensitive to and responsive to the patterns of thought that are recurrent in human experience (this is simply to reiterate what is said above). For this reason I use examples throughout the discussion both to illustrate and to criticise the theories that are discussed. For the same reason, I have begun this discussion not with a theoretical problem as such; rather, I have formed a theoretical question from certain intuitions and terms that seem to arise in consideration of the examples that have been presented.

These intuitions and terms began with the observation that certain people (such as Wittgenstein) appear to suffer a great deal and yet continue to value their lives, which in turn reduces their suffering, while others (like Ilych) do not value their lives, and suffer because of that, despite having been subject to fewer of the obvious causes of suffering. I have connected these observations with the idea that a person's response to suffering is linked to certain ethical concepts, i.e. to whether or not she thinks she has lived in ways that she regards as 'right' or 'wrong'. Finally, I have taken up Cassell's analysis of suffering which links suffering with the concepts of personal integrity and personal wholeness and noted how this analysis appears to be supported by Gaita.<sup>20</sup> From these related ideas I have formed my core questions: What is it for a person to be whole or not whole? How do these conditions relate to a person's suffering and the value she places on her life?

In order to answer these questions I will examine two existing theories of personal wholeness. The first is a theory that has been recently advanced by Christine Korsgaard but which has its roots in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Korsgaard's view is that wholeness, or 'self-constitution', is the goal of a human life, and – moreover – the basis of morality. This view is based on our need to think rationally about our actions and our selves. Korsgaard argues that this need requires us to develop a 'self conception' and that this self-conception governs our values, and hence our thoughts about what we should and should not do. On her view, wholeness is acting on reasons that are congruent with one's self

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<sup>20</sup> We could include with Gaita any philosopher who regards unity as an important human value. Plato is one of the first to have espoused this view. Kant, Korsgaard, and Spinoza also belong to this group, as I will explain in the coming chapters.

conception. Since one's values arise from these self-conceptions it follows that acting against them means acting against one's values. In this way Korsgaard's account shows wholeness to be a condition in which one values oneself and *unwholeness* (or 'brokenness') to be a condition in which one does not value oneself.

Korsgaard's theory of wholeness is worth considering for several reasons. Firstly, it offers a compelling account of moral obligation and ethical discourse, which is critically related to a person's identity and a concept of wholeness, and so it is at least compatible with the intuitions and terms that I have described. Secondly, it has exercised considerable influence on contemporary moral theory and has been the subject of much discussion.<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, it offers definitions of several concepts that are current in bioethical literature, such as autonomy, value, and personhood. Fourthly, it is a Kantian theory, and given that Kantian theories have had a significant role in shaping our political, ethical, and bioethical thinking, it should be relatively accessible to readers who are familiar with those areas of discourse (or at least more accessible than Spinoza's theory which I go on to discuss).

In the discussion of Korsgaard's theory I distil the aspects that seem to me useful, while also showing how it goes wrong. My major objection centres on her account of value. Her theory does not, in my view, offer an account of value that goes beyond the individual evaluations of the rational subject. It therefore fails to offer a positive theory of wholeness, such that would explain the differences that we observe in people like Wittgenstein and Ilych. It does not, in other words, offer an explanation of what is required for a person to remain whole amidst her suffering.

In perceiving the limitations of Korsgaard's theory we come upon what I regard as a serious problem with all post-Kantian ethics, the problem of describing the relationship between the moral subject and her 'reality', which includes her evaluative processes. In my view, this problem overshadows much of our current debate around the concepts I have just mentioned: autonomy, value and personhood. However, in order to grasp the nature of the problem and its scope, it is necessary to go back to Kant's original moral theory, and the conception of wholeness that came with it. For this reason, Korsgaard's theory is not discussed first; instead chapter two is given to discussing Kant's original theory of personal unity and the problems that it generated. There I explain how Kant's transcendental philosophy was formed as a response to Hume's radical critique of personal identity, and how this response generated a dual conception of the person and with that a dual conception of value (these correspond with Kant's ontological division of 'noumena' and 'phenomena').

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<sup>21</sup> See for example McNamara, 'Symposium on the work of Christine M. Korsgaard', which was published in July of 2011.

While the primary purpose of the discussion of Kant's theory in chapter two is to lay the groundwork for my criticism of Korsgaard, it also serves two secondary purposes. Firstly, it provides a general introduction to the philosophy of identity as it applies to the concept of personal wholeness: in outlining Kant's position I also discuss the ways that Descartes, Locke and Hume addressed the problem of personal identity. Secondly, Kant's theory is interesting in its own right, in that it offers a distinct perspective on the apparent relationship between wholeness and suffering that I have described (i.e. an answer that is unlike Korsgaard's). Kant asserted that a virtuous person maintains a sense of self-respect even in the most unhappy of circumstances, and that the moral value from which this self respect is generated is supreme over all other values. Yet for all its grandeur, Kant's theory fails to describe the value of personal unity. I argue that this failure relates back to Kant's response to Hume's conclusions, and to the metaphysics of freedom that was a part of this response.

Korsgaard's theory is discussed in chapter three. Having set out the core elements of her position, I then attack her conception of 'moral value'. Korsgaard presents her theory as a restatement of Kant's original and her conception of moral value as distinct from ordinary value in the way that Kant's was. I argue that this is incorrect, and that her moral value is unlike Kant's moral value because it is not based on Kantian metaphysics. Whereas Kant's moral value is based on his notion of the transcendental, or noumenal self, and the account of autonomy that is associated with it, Korsgaard's conception of moral value is based on the self-reflective reasoning of the individual subject. Thus, it lacks the 'metaphysical consolation' that Kant attributed to the moral life, and leaves morality ultimately dependent on the assumption that the individual does in fact regard her life to be worth living, and by implication on whatever she regards as necessary for that value to be upheld.

In chapter four I consider a way of extending Korsgaard's theory, through what I term an 'intersubjective' approach to value. This approach to value is based on Korsgaard's argument regarding the 'publicity' of reasons, in which she claims to show that we are able to obligate each other by exchanging reasons. I argue that this argument provides the basis for our common notions of value as they are revealed through our shared meanings. This describes much of what is typically regarded as ethical discourse, and provides the logical grounding for many of our ethical claims. Moreover, it shows how we can understand a person's ability to maintain wholeness, and another person's inability to maintain wholeness, by examining the coherence of her self-conception and the reasons that are available to her. This view of wholeness can to some extent incorporate the concepts of meaning, purpose and inspiration which are associated in current discussions of suffering and healthcare with a

person's ability to endure suffering. However, though it can incorporate these concepts, it does not extend or refine them in a way that takes us beyond those discussions.

Chapters two, three and four comprise part one of the thesis, because they are built around Korsgaard's neo-Kantian account of wholeness. In part two I discuss the second theory of wholeness, which is derived from the philosophy of Spinoza. Spinoza's views are less familiar to contemporary thinkers and have had less impact on contemporary political and ethical discussion. However, in recent years there has been a growing interest in his ideas and a community of Spinoza scholarship is emerging.<sup>22</sup> My own interest has grown through an examination of his account of value, which centres on the relationship between the moral agent and her reality.

On the Spinozistic view, a person is an agent continually interacting with other agents (both personal and non-personal). Her nature is to actualise her innate power as an agent. She does this by joining her power with those other agents with which she is interacting. This is only possible in so far as the respective powers (or 'natures') of the two agents can be united. Knowing how to unite one's power with another's requires 'adequate' knowledge. Reasoning, which is central to the Kantian conception of the self, is a kind of adequate knowledge, but is not perfect knowledge. Perfect knowledge is knowledge of nature itself. It is knowledge of oneself as a part of nature, and as in that respect eternal. In so far as one knows oneself in this way one is able to act freely. On this view, the degree to which a person is *whole* is the degree to which she has knowledge of her eternal nature: the degree to which she is free.

In chapter five I introduce Spinoza's ontological framework. I begin by explaining how Spinoza's starting point differs from the post-Cartesian Kantian starting point and how this allows him to preserve an essential connection between the individual and reality. I then provide an overview of Spinoza's conception of eternal reality (God or Nature) and the conception of the individual that follows from it. The individual, on this view, is a unified finite determination of the infinite potency of eternal reality, brought into being as this power determines itself in infinitely many ways. Having set out this ontological foundation, I then introduce Spinoza's ethical and epistemological doctrines, which are necessary to understand the Spinozistic conception of wholeness. The chapter closes with a summary of how Spinoza's theory of wholeness compares to Korsgaard's. The critical difference in terms of this study is that Spinoza offers a positive conception of what it is that gives value to a person's life and thus shows a path towards wholeness.

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<sup>22</sup> Beth Lord of Dundee University has set up a Spinoza research network. See <http://spinozaresearchnetwork.wordpress.com/>

In chapter six I begin to explore the implications of Spinoza's theory. The central idea is that a person is more whole, i.e. in 'greater part eternal', as she is more active through adequate knowledge of her nature. To be this way is to enjoy one's self and to delight in others. In the first part of this chapter I recast Spinoza's conception of wholeness from the perspective of the individual as an embodied agent on a developmental trajectory, along which she endeavours to grow in knowledge of herself and her environment. In the second part of the chapter I discuss three examples which illustrate how a person may have greater or lesser knowledge of her nature as her life is formed in various ways. This provides an interpretation of what it means for a person's mind to be more or less 'eternal'.

In chapter seven I summarise Spinoza's account of wholeness and apply it to the examples of Wittgenstein and Ilych that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I close by outlining several topics of research which could be developed from this study.

As far as I am aware, this thesis is the first to attempt to apply Kantian and Spinozistic theories of personhood to the concept of personal wholeness as it has been discussed in relation to suffering and health. Attempts have been made to introduce Spinoza to bioethical discourse,<sup>23</sup> but there has not yet been a substantial uptake of his ideas, or a systematic Spinozistic critique of traditional bioethical principles (beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice). Given my specific application of Korsgaard and Spinoza's theories I do not engage in detail with the current philosophical literature. My criticism of Korsgaard could be related to the current debates surrounding her work but although this would be worthwhile as a scholarly exercise that would perhaps enable broader dialogue, it would distract from the main purposes of the discussion, which are to develop the implications of her theory of unity for our understanding of suffering, and to show how those debates are undercut by the ontological shift that I propose (many of the issues surrounding Korsgaard's theory simply do not arise if we abandon her Kantian framework, though this of course means abandoning the greater part of her position). In my discussion of Spinoza's theory I have relied primarily on Spinoza's own writings, and on the expository work of H.F. Hallett. I have not engaged with more recent scholarship because I have not found this literature to be directly addressing the particular questions regarding the relationship between unity and suffering that I have identified in bioethical literature. It is my intention that after the completion of the thesis I will connect the interpretation of Spinoza's ideas that are developed in it with wider Spinoza research, and apply this research to further bioethical study.

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<sup>23</sup> See for example Donnelly, 'Human Selves, Chronic Illness, and the Ethics of Medicine'.

## PART ONE

### A Neo-Kantian Theory of Personal Wholeness

## CHAPTER 2

### THE KANTIAN SUBJECT

A person can suffer and yet continue to regard her life as worthwhile. It appears that this sense of worth can be understood through seeing how the person's life as a 'whole' is valued over and above her suffering. It also seems that a person can *be* more or less 'whole', and that this in some way determines whether or not a person is suffering. However, it is difficult to apply or develop these claims because it is not clear how a person can be 'whole' or what it means for a person to value her life 'as a whole'.

Neo-Kantian scholar Christine Korsgaard has recently argued that achieving wholeness is the purpose of being moral. Her view is that morality is grounded in our need to think rationally about ourselves and our actions, and that thinking rationally about ourselves and our actions drives us towards integrity, i.e. wholeness. We are whole, on this view, when our actions cohere with our self-conception (i.e. our identity). We value such wholeness because we are fundamentally concerned about being 'free', i.e. having control over our actions, and hence we value acting in ways that faithfully express 'who we are' (i.e. in ways that cohere with our identities). On this view, though Wittgenstein's life involved much pain he did not 'suffer' in the sense that he remained 'whole' by acting on principles that were self-consciously consistent with his self-conception, which in turn meant that he valued his life. Ilych, on the other hand, suffered greatly at the end of his life, because he could not see his actions as consistent with who he now understood himself to be, and so was not whole and could not value his life.

There are several reasons why Korsgaard's theory is worthy of attention. It is fundamentally a Kantian theory, and Kantian theory generally has had considerable influence on contemporary ethical and political thought. Korsgaard's theory in particular incorporates a number of current ideas about what it is to be a person. More importantly, there are several aspects of her theory that are useful. It is true, I will argue, that wholeness involves agreement between one's actions and one's identity. A human life is unified and hence valued in so far as it actualises a coherent identity. Thus, at the heart of Wittgenstein's 'wonderful' life was a coherent identity that he had lived out. It is also true, I think, that our actions and identity are in part governed by the reasons we act upon, and that these reasons are in part governed by our self conception. We are, in certain respects, formed through – i.e.

constituted by – the ways that we think about ourselves and our actions (I *am* a person who acts on certain reasons and not others). I believe that these are ideas worth exploring, particularly as they advance our understanding of what it is for a person to be whole and how such wholeness relates to a person's suffering. However, because of the relevance and power of Korsgaard's position, it is also important that we see how it is wrong. It is wrong, I will argue, to say that one's identity is formed wholly through the coherence of one's actions and 'self-conception'. Our thoughts are formative, but we are more than our thoughts: we are unified agents essentially related to other agents. Though our agency is liberated through knowledge (which is in part a matter of rational apprehension), it is fundamentally a matter of self-actualisation, which is the agent as the adequate cause of her actions. These flaws in Korsgaard's position will be brought out as the discussion proceeds, and the correctives will be explained through discussion of Spinoza's ontology.

Korsgaard regards her theory as simply a restatement of Kant's original. This is not the case. Kant does not conceive wholeness as constituted in self-understanding, but as constituted by adherence to the principles of pure practical reason, which are independent of any individual's self-understanding. Kant's theory of wholeness raises problems that Korsgaard's does not, but also claims strengths that hers cannot. My criticisms of Korsgaard may be in large part related to her apparent failure to notice or acknowledge how her theory differs from Kant's. For this reason I am in this chapter explaining Kant's original formulation of the 'person' and the concept of wholeness that comes with it. Having his position clearly in view will enable us to more readily understand the strengths and limitations of Korsgaard's.

The conception of wholeness that Kant offered is based on his post-Humean critique of metaphysics. As just noted, he conceives the unity of the person as consisting in adherence to the formal demands of 'pure practical reason', which in his view underpin the freedom and worth of a person. This conception involves a radical distinction between moral and non-moral value, the former being identified with the principles of pure practical reason and the latter with an individual's desires. If Kant has indeed substantially influenced contemporary thought then this distinction may explain why the connection between ethics and suffering has received little critical attention in modern philosophy, because it leads to a radical separation of a person's moral duty and her desire to prevent or limit suffering in herself and others (though as we shall see in Kant's theory this separation is not – and I would say cannot be – absolute).

Note that throughout this thesis the terms wholeness, integrity and unity will be used more-or-less interchangeably, except on certain occasions where a possible distinction emerges. In this respect, the basic question may be variously expressed in these ways: What is it for a person to be whole or not whole, integrated or not integrated, unified or not unified?

## 2.1 Kant's Cartesian heritage

As noted, Kant's conception of morality, and his distinction between moral and non-moral value is grounded in his metaphysics. To appreciate why he took up his particular position on metaphysics one must have an appreciation of the philosophy he was responding to and informed by. A key motivator of Kant's philosophy was the philosophy of David Hume, which seemed to make a compelling argument for rejecting all metaphysical concepts, in particular the concept of God, the concept of 'the self', and the concept of causality central to the then rapidly advancing sciences. Kant famously wrote in the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that it was Hume who 'awoke him from his dogmatic slumber'.<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this discussion what is most relevant is the manner in which Kant was responding to Hume's view of the self and its relationship to the world. This aspect of Hume's philosophy was itself rooted in John Locke's empiricism, and ultimately Descartes' scepticism. In this respect, Kant's conception of wholeness traces back to Cartesian premises. This is significant because Spinoza's philosophy, which I come to later, is perhaps unique in its rejection of these premises. I therefore begin this discussion of Kant's conception of wholeness with a précis of Descartes, Locke and Hume, and their respective conceptions of the self.

## 2.2 The Cartesian problem and the Cartesian person

Descartes' philosophy begins with the search for epistemic certainty, i.e. true knowledge, and his method for finding it is was the introspective method of 'radical doubt'. This search was prompted by dissatisfaction with the scholastic models of explanation, which tended to be analogical, and a desire for explanations in terms of universal properties.<sup>25</sup> In order to have such explanations it is necessary to have a method of identifying universal properties. Descartes' method was to identify all knowledge that could *possibly* be false (accordingly to his imagination), and to set it temporarily aside, so as to discern if anything could be asserted

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ree, *J Descartes*, 40.

with indubitable certainty. In the first of his ‘meditations’ he presents three arguments for doubting the information given through our senses. The first is simply that we sometimes find that our perceptions are false; and given that this is the case how can we be sure that we will not later find the same of all perceptions?<sup>26</sup> The second is that sometimes when we dream we think we are awake; how can we be sure that we are not dreaming now?<sup>27</sup> The third involves the so-called ‘evil demon hypothesis’, which posits the idea of a malicious creature who has the power to alter the appearance of things, or place thoughts in my head, and so, e.g. make me think that something that is red is actually blue, etc; how can we be sure that we are not currently being deceived in this way by such a being?<sup>28</sup> In response to these doubts, Descartes set aside all the familiar forms of knowledge (knowledge of the world of people and things), and finally arrived at the conclusion that the only thing that was indubitably certain was that he was thinking. He then famously inferred that since he was certainly thinking he must certainly exist: ‘I think therefore I am’.<sup>29</sup>

Immediately after drawing this conclusion Descartes acknowledged that he was not yet certain of the manner of this existence, and provisionally settled on the idea that he exists as a ‘thinking thing’, which he expanded to mean a thing which ‘doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions’.<sup>30</sup> So he arrived at the solipsistic predicament: he was sure he existed, but was unsure of the existence of everything else. To escape this quandary he reasoned that we can discern in the nature of certain thoughts a kind of necessity that conveys to us the formal character of reality, and then used this to prove the existence of God.<sup>31</sup> He then argued that ‘God cannot be deceptive’. This restored his confidence in the ordinary method of checking the information given through the senses, and of knowing whether or not one is asleep. It also allowed him to stop worrying about the possibility of being deceived by an evil demon (God being necessarily greater than the hypothetical demon). In this way he re-established the common sense notion that the objects of experience (including other people) actually do exist as they appear.<sup>32</sup>

My present interest in Descartes’ *Meditations* relates not so much to his conclusions as how he arrived at them. Of particular importance is his idea that knowledge should be

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<sup>26</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, 31. His ‘ontological argument’, as it came to be known, involves a reversion to a scholastic distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘objective’ reality.

<sup>32</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, 55-6. It is, as a number of commentators have pointed out, difficult to say exactly what role God plays in reassuring Descartes of the reliability of his senses, but I need not go into that here.

grounded in the immediacy of individual consciousness and then constructed out of what is found therein (in his case, primarily his thoughts). This formulation of the epistemological ‘nexus’ – the link between knowledge and reality – is his greater legacy to Western philosophy, rather than the metaphysical system he arrived at. That is not to say that his system was altogether ignored, as it was in fact highly influential. I will briefly review his metaphysics of the person and indicate where it brings us to in regard the question of how a person can be integrated or whole.

Descartes conceived the person as made up of two distinct substances, a mind and a body. As distinct substances they have different properties. For example, the mind is indivisible whereas the body is divisible (this was shown, he argued, by the fact that losing a part of the body does not entail losing a part of the mind).<sup>33</sup> Also, the mind is self directing while the body is a mechanism. Yet despite being ontologically distinct, somehow the two ‘intermingle’, for the mind is both affected by and has a degree of control over the body. This ‘mind-body substance dualism’ is notoriously problematic, particularly as Descartes is not able to offer a satisfactory explanation of how the parts interact, and there are very few who still regard it as a serious philosophical position (though there are aspects of it that remain current in popular thinking, in particular the close association of consciousness and personhood, and the widespread notion that the mind is a conscious ‘entity’ persisting through time until it either dies or ‘departs’). Even if we could accept the dualist metaphysics, and identify the person solely with the theoretical ‘mental entity’ (the soul) that is present in the body for a finite period, there is still no account of how this person can be more or less integrated, whole or not whole; unless perhaps wholeness were measured in terms of temporal existence or of the logical consistency of a coincident ‘package’ of thoughts. This tells us nothing about the relationship between a person’s suffering and the worth she places on her life; much less how Wittgenstein could see his life as wonderful, or why Ilych saw his life as ‘wrong’.

Kant’s conception does offer a response to these questions, and it is towards his conception that I am moving. However, as noted, to properly appraise Kant’s position we must also know something about how John Locke and David Hume developed Descartes’ position. In the next section I will summarise how their ‘empiricist’ philosophies followed from Descartes’ formulation of the epistemological nexus, and how they each came to conceive the person from within that framework.

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<sup>33</sup> Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch, 59.

### 2.3 Locke, Hume and the empirical person

As noted, Western philosophy for the most part accepted Descartes' separation of things as they are and things as they are consciously experienced.<sup>34</sup> From this position, the primary philosophical problem is to build – or rather rebuild – knowledge of the world through examining the contents of the conscious mind, i.e., the 'information' gathered through experience and the thoughts that we have about it. Philosophers of the Rationalist tradition argued that reality can be discerned through structures of reason. The British Empiricists took what they regarded as a more 'common sense' approach, and focused instead on experience. In their view, the Rationalist idea that 'truth' was somehow implanted in our minds was both fanciful and unhelpful, as no-one could show that such 'innate' knowledge exists or – even allowing that it may exist – demonstrate any practical use for it. Moreover, for them it carried overtones of the metaphysical dogmatism from which the enlightenment was supposed to free us. It was in the context of this broad philosophical debate that John Locke famously described the mind as initially like 'white paper, void of all characters',<sup>35</sup> and proposed that all knowledge is 'written' on the mind through the course of experience.

In order to establish this epistemological position Locke attempted to connect all existing knowledge claims to so-called 'ideas' of experience, i.e. the traces that are imprinted on the blank slate of the mind by perceptual media. This left him and many philosophers after him with a problem when it came to the matter of 'personal identity', for reasons that I will explain. Locke defined a person as

'... a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, mediate, or will anything, we know we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions: and by this everyone is to himself that which he calls *self* ... For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls *self* and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists *personal identity* i.e. the sameness of a rational being. And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the

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<sup>34</sup> Ward, *History of Philosophy I*, 35. As I mentioned, the exception is Spinoza.

<sup>35</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1, section 2.

Identity of that *Person*; it is the same *self* now [as] it was then, and 'tis by the same *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done.<sup>36</sup>

This position is similar to Descartes' in that the person is identified with her consciousness, but differs in that it explains the continuity of the person simply as a 'conscious awareness', rather than as instantiated in an ontological property (i.e. the indivisibility of mind). In other words, for Locke, we are 'who we are' because we are aware of ourselves as the same consciousness over time having experiences that we have, and not because we are a certain 'thing' having a certain substance. Thus, he relies on a basic 'sense' that I am the same person experiencing *my* various experiences.

The problem with Locke's position, as Butler pointed out, is that consciousness of identity cannot constitute identity but rather presupposes it.<sup>37</sup> This thought led Hume to conclude that the idea of identity is in fact a fallacy. He asserted that philosophers like Descartes and Locke have simply 'imagined' that we are

'...intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity. ... Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of *self* after the manner it is here explain'd. For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd?'<sup>38</sup>

Hume is being a good empiricist in that he is seeking to ground all knowledge on the content of experience and not on metaphysical presumption. He is being a better empiricist than Locke by acknowledging that when he looks at the content of his experience he finds nothing (i.e. 'no impression') that corresponds with – and hence justifies – the claim that he has knowledge of a continuous self:

'For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at anytime without a perception, and never can observe anything but a perception'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter xxvii, section 9.

<sup>37</sup> Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, 312.

<sup>38</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, SB 251.

<sup>39</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, SB 252.

While Hume is widely admired for his unflinching philosophical rigor, here he displays a form of intellectual blindness, for it is clear that the act of introspection by which he rejects the notion of selfhood is inherently self-involving (hence his use of the personal pronoun in describing this act).<sup>40</sup> It seems that he cannot wholly escape the ‘sense’ of selfhood that Locke identified. Nevertheless, he is correct in pointing out that this sense cannot be adequately explained through the empiricist method. In requiring knowledge to be grounded on the *content* of experience (i.e. the ideas or impressions that comprise the objects of experience), Locke and Hume are not able to conceive the self as something that is known. Where others (like Kant) would regard this as reason to reconsider the epistemological starting point (as we shall see, Kant argues that we have knowledge of the experiencing subject through analysis of the structure of experience), Hume presses on to what must be the logical limits of his position, and proposes what is now known as the ‘bundle theory’ of the self. According to this theory, what we are is nothing more than a ‘collection’ of successive and different perceptions in ‘perceptual flux and motion’.<sup>41</sup> In an attempt to illustrate this position, Hume suggests that the mind is like a ‘theatre’ in which perceptions ‘make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations’, but then he immediately qualifies this image by pointing out there are *only* the perceptions. There are, in other words, no seats in this theatre, and no audience, and thus no ‘extra-self’ that is ‘watching the show’.<sup>42</sup> I hardly need to point out that there is nothing in this account of the person on which to hang a notion of unity, other than the various associations and relations of the contents of experience. Life viewed this way is a ‘stream of consciousness’, but it is not a stream that travels any particular course or direction.<sup>43</sup>

There is a further disanalogy between Hume’s bundle theory of the self and his image of the mind as a theatre. The disanalogy already noted is that the Humean mind has no ‘spectator’. We might also consider that in most theatre we expect the show to involve some kind of narrative. There must be a story, or an idea, or simply a ‘point’, by which the act or movie hangs together. It cannot be just random. How could anyone perform in a show that was *purely* random, and who would watch it? Similarly, with a person, we expect and aspire

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<sup>40</sup> Ward describes this as the best example he has seen of ‘not being able to see the woods for the trees’. Ward, *History of Philosophy 1*, 155.

<sup>41</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, SB 253.

<sup>42</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, SB 253.

<sup>43</sup> Empirically speaking, it seems incontestable that people change considerably over the course of a life time, in a range of ways both predictable and unpredictable. However, it does not follow that a person’s life is essentially formless, and that change is all there ever is. While it is possible that some people view their lives (unreflectively perhaps) merely as the occurrence of disparate experiences, I suggest this would be very unusual. Most people view themselves as somehow continuous, irrespective of the changes each undergoes. What we do not yet have is an account of what this continuity consists of, and hence we do not have an account of how a person can be more or less integrated.

to a degree of coherence. The question is *where* in the person this coherence is to be located, when persons have been conceived in terms of consciousness and conscious experience.

A notion of narrative coherence is implied in a supplement that Locke added to his definition of the person: ‘Person’, he said, ‘is a forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness and misery’. The thought here is that we are able to conform our behaviour to laws in the hope of increasing our ‘happiness’ and decreasing our ‘misery’, and that this supplies a further way of identifying a person, *viz.* by their patterns of behaviour. Viewed this way, the ‘sameness’ that we identify, both in ourselves and in other persons, is that of character: it is in the ways that a person acts in and responds to circumstances.<sup>44</sup> Following Kant, this notion of law may be related to the notion of rational coherence, for Kant conceives a law as a kind of principle or rule, known through our use of concepts, i.e. our reasoning. However, to make this move we need an account of the person that incorporates our use of concepts (our rational faculties). Locke and Hume were committed to the idea that the meaning of words must always correspond with the content of experience, and this model can only work for proper names; it cannot account for the variety of words that are used in a language, including for instance general terms.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Locke and Hume had difficulty accounting for our capacity for ‘a law’ and our ‘patterns of behaviour’. In my view, to understand this capacity we need to look beyond the perceptual content of experience and consider the structure of the mind that perceives, thinks and acts; a structure that is over and above its particular thoughts and actions. In other words, we need to move beyond the empiricist framework.

## 2.4 The person through transcendental analysis

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Immanuel Kant launched a new philosophical venture: a method of identifying universal truth that he called ‘transcendental philosophy’. Transcendental philosophy examines the conditions of the possibility of something that is already evident; it examines, in other words, what must be supposed to exist given the existence of something else.<sup>46</sup> In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant examines the conditions of the possibility of experience, the bedrock of empiricist philosophy, and the conditions of

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<sup>44</sup> This amendment to Locke’s theory and augmentation of Hume is proposed by Ward in ‘The Solution of the Problem of Personal Identity via Locke, Butler and Hume’. See also Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 105-6

<sup>45</sup> Another British empiricist George Berkeley came very close to uncovering this basic flaw when he attacked Locke’s notion of ‘abstract general ideas’. See section 18 of the introduction to *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. This link is discussed in Ward, *History of Philosophy I*, 103.

<sup>46</sup> For a summary of this method see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, introduction (B), especially chapter VII.

the possibility of thought, the bedrock of rationalist philosophy. He calls it the *critique* of ‘pure reason’ because he regards it as establishing both the basis of metaphysical reasoning and its legitimate scope.<sup>47</sup> In his second Critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he examines the conditions of the possibility of human action. In both works Kant begins to develop an account of personal identity that moves beyond the sceptical impasse (sometimes called the no-self view) arrived at through empiricism.

The First Critique is primarily concerned with the person as an epistemic subject. This is less relevant to our present inquiry, but nevertheless needs to be considered so that we understand how Kant establishes the basic unity of the person. In the second Critique Kant extends this notion of basic unity in developing his account of the moral subject.<sup>48</sup> Most of this chapter is focussed on that development, as it is there that we find a practical account of wholeness that speaks to the questions that I am attempting to answer.

#### 2.4.1 The knowing subject

Kant accepted Hume’s claim that there is no idea of a unified self located in experience. In his terminology, this means that the self is not a ‘phenomenon’: it is not an ‘object’ of experience, i.e. something that we can locate in space and time. However, Kant does not conclude from this that there is no self. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he presents a transcendental argument for why there must be a unitary self in order for experience, and knowledge of experience, to be possible. This argument incorporates the point made earlier in relation to Hume’s rejection of idea of the self, in that it locates the ‘I’ who perceives the ‘ideas’ of experience. The perceiving self, says Kant, belongs to the category of ‘Noumena’, which is everything that we must suppose to be the case on the basis of transcendental analysis; everything that we must suppose to exist in order to think coherently about ourselves and our world. They are for Kant *apodictic*, i.e. they are universally true, whereas ‘phenomena’ – the content of experience – are always provisional.<sup>49</sup>

Kant’s argument for the unity of the self in the first Critique is relatively straightforward. Experience, he argues, cannot be conceived as simply a ‘manifold’ of indiscriminate and unrelated sensory impressions, because what we call conscious experience involves both sensory and cognitive activities that unify objects according to particular forms.

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<sup>47</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxv.

<sup>48</sup> Gillett develops the link between Kant’s account of the ‘cognitive subject’ and our being as moral agents in *Subjectivity and Being Somebody*. See especially Gillett, *Subjectivity and Being Somebody*, 64-8 & 100-1.

<sup>49</sup> Note that this distinction between noumena and phenomena traces back to Descartes earlier position regarding the unreliability of experience. Kant remains in significant respects a Cartesian.

For example, the perception of a cat involves a certain pattern of sensory stimuli – the appearance of a particular shape and colour, a certain sound that it makes, and so on – and also the concepts that enable us to *recognise* these sensory impressions, most obviously the concept of ‘cat’. These sensory and cognitive activities involve bringing the ‘manifold’ of impressions together through a series of synthetic operations. The sensory aspects must be synthesised in space and time; I must, for example, be able to locate the ‘meow’ in spatio-temporal relation to the cat’s mouth (I am aware that I hear the sound at (roughly) *the same time* as when the cat’s mouth is open, and I locate it as *coming from* the region around the cat’s mouth).<sup>50</sup> The cognitive aspects require first the ability to notice that the particular impressions belong to a single object (we must see the mouth as *part* of the head, and the head as *part* of the body, etc), and to apprehend and apply a concept to that object, in this case, the concept ‘cat’ (this provides me with the awareness that ‘this is a cat’).<sup>51</sup> All of these synthesising operations of sense and cognition happen as a unified process: they belong to the single act of unfolding awareness. Thus, experience is not a disjointed sequence of discreet ‘ideas’ that is somehow imprinted on our waiting consciousness; it is the coordinated operations of an agent equipped with relevant sensory and cognitive schemata apt for responding to the world in a sustainable way. Kant describes this overarching unity that is coordinating the operations of perception and cognition as the ‘unity of apperception’. It is the ‘I think’ of Descartes’ cogito but conceived in terms of its functioning rather than as mere phenomenon (and without the metaphysical baggage).<sup>52</sup> It is the ‘self’ that *is* Hume, introspectively ‘looking’ for *himself* in the contents of his experience, but which cannot be found there because it is in fact what makes the experience happen.<sup>53</sup> So, in short, Kant’s argument in his first Critique for the continuity of the self is that in order for experience to take place it must be the case that there is a unitary subject that is capable of performing the synthetic processes involved in perception and cognition. There is experience, so there must be a unitary subject. QED.

This concept of unity established in the *Critique of Pure Reason* does not in itself explain individual identity, or provide answers to my questions about suffering and value, but it does lay the metaphysical foundations for the position that is subsequently developed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Moreover, one may develop an account of how identity is

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<sup>50</sup> This is discussed in the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’, which is first part of the ‘Transcendental Doctrine of Elements’. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 63-74.

<sup>51</sup> This is discussed in the ‘Transcendental Logic’, which is the second part of the doctrine of elements. Kant’s account of the faculties and processes required for using concepts is highly developed. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 193-245.

<sup>52</sup> See especially Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, sections A107 and B400, 136 & 329.

<sup>53</sup> See also Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, sections B 135 and B 404.

formed by considering how the ‘self’ as noumenon becomes aware of itself in phenomenal experience. In the act of experience the unified self becomes aware of itself through its sensory and conceptual media. The ‘phenomenal self’ becomes, as it were, an ‘object’ of experience, which the noumenal self attempts to understand through the available images and concepts. This individuating process – the process of working out who I am and what is my place in the world – begins at birth and continues through the course of a person’s life.<sup>54</sup> It happens both through learning and using concepts (the most obvious of which is a person’s name), and secondly through particular ways of being active through the body (in perceiving the body, and by learning to crawl, to walk, to manipulate objects, and so on). Because the transcendental self operates various ‘unifying’ processes, it naturally works to understand itself as a singular entity, in so far as there are images and concepts available to make this possible (‘if I am this, then I must also be that’). However, as this unfolding self-knowledge occurs in the phenomenal world it cannot, on Kant’s premises, be *apodictic*. This would perhaps explain why we find ourselves to be ‘problematic’, for it indicates how we are liable to ascribe concepts to ourselves that are false, and to attempt to do things that we are not capable of doing. Nevertheless, however distorted or misguided our self-understanding, the core function of the person as a unified subject always remains, because it is a noumenal reality, and as such can never be wholly abandoned.<sup>55</sup>

In summary, by describing the unified unifying processes that make knowledge of experience possible Kant not only provides a powerful account of perception, cognition and language, but also a metaphysical foundation for identity. He also provides a basis for understanding how identity develops, and a clue as to why a person would be concerned about unity: given that a person is and must think of herself as a unified subject, it seems to follow that she is naturally *concerned* to maintain her unity or integrity. As noted, these ideas find their full expression in Kant’s ‘practical’ philosophy, where he develops a transcendental analysis of our actions, choices, and values. It is in this analysis that we find an account of how the self may be more or less unified, or more or less integrated.

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<sup>54</sup> Gillett, *Subjectivity and Being Somebody*, esp. 103-6

<sup>55</sup> What I have outlined in this paragraph is not explicitly developed by Kant. It is an extension of Kant’s ideas that has been put forward by Gillett in *Subjectivity and Being Somebody*, and is close to the view that Korsgaard puts forward under her notion of ‘practical identity’, which I discuss in the next chapter.

## 2.5 The moral subject

As just mentioned, Kant's second Critique examines the conditions of the possibility of human action. This focus immediately signals a further departure from the empiricist project, as 'action' is not something that is easily fitted into an empiricist's schema. Strictly speaking, it is impossible, because as Hume makes clear, we cannot derive an adequate notion of causality from experience considered as 'impressions' passively affecting the mind, as all we find in experience of that kind is successions of such impressions, repeated in various patterns. Action properly conceived requires causality, because an action involves a potency that 'effects' the act.<sup>56</sup> Action, in other words, is essentially productive, and this productivity cannot be accounted for when knowledge is limited to the 'ideas' that are given in perceptual experience. Under the empiricist framework actions can only be regarded as observed occurrences, or perhaps 'events', which effectively annuls the agency of the person, and renders her instead as the 'passive observer', as implied in Hume's problematic theatre metaphor. Kant however, in making human action the focus of transcendental analysis, is placing agency on the same ontological and epistemological 'footing' as experience and cognition. He is regarding the proposition 'I act' as just as sure as the propositions 'I think' and 'I experience'.

The conception of the person that Kant develops in the second Critique involves two distant parts, each with its own purpose and ontological status. These parts correspond with the phenomena/noumena distinction that I have just described in relation to the person as an epistemic subject. In our phenomenal part we have our 'desires', and our thoughts about how to satisfy them. In our noumenal part is our capacity to reason. Kant recognises that reason is most often deployed in the service of desire, i.e. in enabling us to think through how we get what we want. However, he also argues that the noumenal self may have its own ends, in that it is possible for a person to act on the basis of 'reason alone', which for him means acting on 'principles of pure practical reason'. This is shown, he argues, by our awareness of moral duty, i.e. by our awareness of a duty to act in accordance with certain principles sometimes *against* our desires in accordance with the principles of pure practical reason. Virtue, and also self-worth, says Kant, consists in our obedience to the moral law,<sup>57</sup> while happiness consists in the satisfaction of our 'desires'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza: the Elements of his Philosophy*, 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 20.

Following Kant's separation of virtue and happiness it becomes very difficult to conceive the self as completely unified or whole, because this separation involves two necessarily distinct and not necessarily compatible goals. How we resolve this tension depends on how we understand the requirements of 'pure practical reason' and their relation to the self. Kant insisted that the self as we know it is always subject to those requirements, and so did not think that the self could be unified without the involvement of God. Several neo-Kantian scholars, notably Christine Korsgaard (discussed in the next chapter), take a more naturalistic approach and argue that unity does not require an act of God but rather the individual acting on and committing to certain principles. Before I come to these difficulties, let us first look in more detail at Kant's position, so as to understand how he arrived at the idea that there are two not necessarily compatible parts to the person, and at the corresponding distinction between virtue and happiness.

### 2.5.1 The 'lower' faculty of desire

In the Kantian system a desire is any want or need that a person may have. Whether or not a person's desires are satisfied will determine whether or not she is happy. Desires arise in the phenomenal experience as a proposal to act. They carry an intrinsic motivation in the form of an affective impetus,<sup>59</sup> but they are not simply impulses or feelings, because our conscious awareness involves apprehending them under the available concepts (this relates back to the analysis of experience set out in the first Critique). To incorporate this cognitive aspect, Kant describes them as incentives or 'maxims'. Consider, for example, the desire to eat. Hunger is felt as a form of pain which we are naturally inclined to address, and satisfying hunger usually generates a form of pleasure. Our awareness of this feeling involves a certain description (e.g. 'I am hungry'), which is generally associated with a range of possible strategies for addressing it (e.g. I am hungry, I want some food; I will go to the fridge), which together form the 'proposal' to act. The resulting maxim is a conscious thought grounded in a particular feeling and directed towards a particular action (perhaps: I am going to the fridge to find and eat food).

If a desire did not have the cognitive aspect just described then it could not be used as the ground of an action. This is because human action requires rational reflection, i.e. reasoning that has been consciously applied – 'reflected' – onto oneself and one's present

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<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 21.

situation.<sup>60</sup> It requires it in the sense that it is a necessary part of a person being the cause of her action, i.e. of controlling what she does. This requirement is evident in the way that we make decisions, and follows from the transcendental analysis of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the conscious *noumenal* self is shown to be the basis of unity that involves the application of concepts in forming the content of experience. Intentional human action, by which I mean actions that follow from a person's decision, cannot occur unless there is an element of thought, and that usually involves creating a conception of the action and its result. To demonstrate this point, I would simply invite the reader to try making a decision without thinking. It is possible, of course, to decide that one will act on the basis of a certain sense or feeling, but this still involves the formation of a thought, and is in that respect still a rational act.<sup>61</sup> If all that one had was an *unrecognised* feeling, then one could not make a decision, because there would be no thought by which to direct one's actions. There may be action governed by an instinct (a word that we use to describe a feeling or reaction not connected to a thought), but not an action resulting from decision, and in that respect not an action that one would call one's own.

Desires are not typically isolated in one singular act, but rather involve a series of actions, and hence a series of maxims, working in the service of an overarching 'principle'. Indeed, Kant describes all 'material practical principles' as belonging 'under the general principle of self-love or one's own happiness'.<sup>62</sup> Reason, in other words, serves the faculty of desire by allowing one to organise one's life so that one's desires are more likely to be satisfied. The result is that I can think about my desire for food in various ways: I can think about ways of satisfying it and form a variety of desires accordingly (e.g. I can form a specific desire for cake, a particular kind of cake, that particular cake in a certain place, and so on), and I can connect these associated desires within a broader framework of desire (I can consider, for example, my overarching desire to stay healthy, and whether eating the cake works against that desire, and so on and so forth). Moreover, Kant recognises that rationality enables us to form desires that generate more 'refined' or lasting satisfaction (he mentions reading an instructive book, intellectual conversation, the satisfaction of exercising power, 'consciousness of spiritual strength in overcoming obstacles', and even the joy associated with giving money to the poor).<sup>63</sup> However, he also insists that in terms of value there is no

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<sup>60</sup> In contrast with thoughts that appear in consciousness but are never actually *considered*. Rational reflection may involve but does not require deliberation, for deliberation is simply an extended process of reflection.

<sup>61</sup> Note that I am not saying that all controlled actions must be accompanied by a thought. A person who has so mastered a task that she does it without thinking is still, in one sense, in control of what she does. However, I would argue that this mastery is developed through considered action being repeated over time.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 22.

distinction between desires arising from the ‘senses’ or the ‘understanding’, other than the degree or length of pleasure we experience. From the perspective of desire reading a book is only better than, say, drinking a beer, if the sum of enjoyment gained is greater.<sup>64</sup>

If there is a basis for saying that reading a book is better than drinking a beer, other than it bringing more enjoyment, then it would involve an appeal to a different kind of value, or a different kind of principle to which our decisions are answerable, besides the principle of self-love. For Kant, the only other kind of value is moral value, which he thinks cannot possibly be grounded in desire, but only in pure practical reason, which has a basis wholly apart from the interests of the individual agent.

### 2.5.2 The moral law and personal unity

Kant’s understanding of the moral law is inseparable from his metaphysical position, for it is conceptually dependent on his understanding of freedom, responsibility and dignity. Nevertheless he is convinced that his position is in agreement with ‘common sense’ morality, and he assumes two key features of moral obligation on the basis of a supposed common understanding. Firstly, he assumes that moral obligation must be *categorical*, i.e. it must have the force of *law* for all people, irrespective of their particular interests or desires. Secondly, he assumes that a person must be free in relation to such laws, i.e. she must be capable of acting in accordance with them if they are to be genuinely obligatory. Both these aspects are illustrated in the following example, which Kant introduces early in the second Critique:

‘Suppose that someone says his lust is irresistible when the desired object and opportunity are present. Ask him whether he would not control his passion if, in front of the house where he has this opportunity, a gallows were erected on which he would be hanged immediately after gratifying his lust. We do not have to guess very long what his answer would be. But ask him whether he thinks it would be possible for him to overcome his love of life, however great it may be, if his sovereign threatened him with the same sudden death unless he made a false deposition against an honourable man whom the ruler wished to destroy under a plausible pretext. Whether he would or not he will perhaps not venture to say; but that it would be possible for him he would certainly admit without hesitation. He judges, therefore, that he can

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<sup>64</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 22. Notice that at this point Kant’s view of the relationship between reason and desire is much like Hume’s, who famously asserted the ‘reason is and ought only be the slave of the passions’. Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 266.

do something because he knows that he ought, and he recognises that he is free – a fact which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.’<sup>65</sup>

Kant assumes in this example that the man in question would acknowledge that there is an imperative to not lie, i.e. that lying so as to condemn the innocent man would be wrong, and that whether or not he lies is undetermined, apart from his own decision (he is, in other words, ‘free’ to decide). This is the link between duty and freedom: our awareness of duty requires us to posit our freedom.

The moral law to which this man feels himself obligated is, says Kant, the *principles of pure practical reason*. This is practical reason considered in itself, i.e. apart from any particular desire. Thus, his first formulation of the moral law is: ‘so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law’.<sup>66</sup> To say that a maxim ‘holds’ is to say that the maxim is valid, i.e. consistent.<sup>67</sup> To know whether a maxim could hold as a ‘principle giving universal law’ requires considering whether it could be ‘valid for the will of every rational being’. This means thinking about whether we would will this maxim if we did not hold the desire presently driving our interest in it, in other words, thinking about this maxim from the perspective of others. We can tell that a maxim is not valid in this way – is non-universalisable – if it contradicts any other maxims that rational beings act upon. Suppose, for example, I am hungry and resolve to look in the fridge at work for something to eat. My maxim here is roughly ‘eat food from the fridge because I am hungry’, and as it stands there is nothing in this maxim that leads to a contradiction. Consider however if I were to open the fridge and find an enticing looking sandwich that has someone else’s name on it. This brings to mind a possible way of satisfying my desire, but the maxim must now be altered in the light of what I see: ‘I am hungry and to address my hunger I will eat this sandwich that belongs to someone else.’ It is obvious that this maxim cannot be universalised because it would not be endorsed by other rational agents (particularly the owner of the sandwich), as it clearly contradicts the principle of personal property. Ergo, it is wrong to eat this sandwich.

In Kant’s theory the agent is unified first by acting in accordance with the moral law, and then by seeing her desires satisfied in a way that is consistent with the moral law. In terms of the example just given, I am whole if I am able to satisfy my hunger in a way that is morally acceptable (i.e. if I can eat my own sandwich). Complete wholeness would be a

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<sup>65</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 17.

situation whereby all of my actions were consistent with the moral law and all of my desires were met. This is what Kant describes as the ‘highest good’: the agreement of ‘virtue’ and ‘happiness’. He does not think this goal is achievable in a finite human existence. The primary reason for this is that he thinks a person only has limited control over her happiness or sadness, i.e. over whether or not her desires are satisfied; whereas her virtue is something that he thinks is solely related to her choices. The separation of virtue and happiness reflects what I regard as the fundamental problem with Kant’s position, as I shall discuss later in the chapter. At this point it is necessary to first explain why Kant thinks the moral law unifies the person, and why virtue must have priority over happiness.

There is an obvious sense in which acting on ‘principles’ is unifying, *viz.* it gives consistency to one’s actions, and preserves the ‘structural’ conditions that makes one’s practical reasoning possible. For example, if I disrespect the principles of private property, then I can no longer rationally claim property for myself, and thus if I continue to claim my own property while disrespecting the property of others I will be divided, i.e. my actions will not agree with my principle (I recognise that there are some obvious objections to this; I discuss these below). One may note that this also establishes a link between virtue and happiness, in that the possibility of having certain desires presupposes a rational framework, which must be upheld by certain principles. A person cannot enjoy their property without, for example, there being a societal ethos that upholds the rights of property. This is roughly the approach that Korsgaard takes in connecting personal unity with moral action. It is however not precisely the approach that Kant takes. His link between the moral law and unity, and his insistence on the priority of virtue, is rather grounded in his metaphysics of freedom.

### **2.5.3 Freedom as requiring pure practical principles**

Kant’s view that the moral law consists of pure practical principles, and that moral actions unify the person as an agent, relates to the link between morality and freedom, and to his understanding of what is required for freedom to be possible. For Kant, any actions that are grounded on desire, however augmented or supported by reason, are never truly free. This is because desires are part of phenomenal experience, and Kant views phenomenal experience as a ‘mechanism’, i.e. a stream of causal relationships; one thing leading to another, then another, and another, in inexorable procession.<sup>68</sup> Thus, a desire, as a ‘proposal’ that arises in

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<sup>68</sup> ‘If, therefore, the material of volition, which cannot be other than an object of desire which is connected to the law, comes into the practical law *as a condition of its possibility*, there results heteronomy of choice, or dependence on natural laws in following some impulse or inclination; it is heteronomy because the will does not

experience, is merely something that *happens to us*: it is a part in a chain of causes, as are our actions that are grounded upon it. If, for example, you were to ask me why I chose to read the instructive book, I might say that it was so I could learn more. Why do I choose to learn? So that I can get a good job. Why do I choose to pursue a good job? So that I can earn more money. Why do I pursue money? So can have a big house. Why a big house? Because a big house is something I desire. If that is my explanation, then all it is is a chain of reasoning that is ultimately serving to satisfy a desire, and if that is the case then Kant would say I am not truly free in this decision. If I had ‘happened’ to experience a different desire my actions would have been different.<sup>69</sup>

With this view of desire and causality in mind one can more readily appreciate why Kant is convinced that the moral law must consist of pure practical principles. An obligation, or imperative, involves the agency of the person; for a person can only be obliged to do what is in his power to do. In Kant’s analysis, obligation arises from our capacity to reason. In regards to our desires, reason *obliges* us to do whatever is required for satisfying our desires. Kant describes these as ‘hypothetical imperatives’, because it is not necessarily the case that I will have any given desire. If we were to challenge a thief simply on the basis of a hypothetical imperative he could reply ‘I considered not stealing the money, but in the end that just didn’t feel right’. If the only possible grounds for this man’s actions were his desires, then we could not blame him for stealing the money; it just happened to be the case that he had a desire to do it, and no desire not to. Even if we suppose him to hold conflicting desires (e.g. desires to steal and to not steal), we still need some criterion apart from desire to determine his action, otherwise it is just the strongest desire that wins, and thus we are still lack a basis for genuine decision.<sup>70</sup> To show that there is something wrong with this defence it must be shown that there is something over and above his desires that allows him to know that not stealing is in fact the ‘right’ thing to do. This, says Kant, is reason ‘purified’ of all empirical content: pure practical principles that apply to all rational agents irrespective of their subjective circumstances.

To further illustrate the necessity of this link that Kant draws between freedom and the moral law, let us return to the example of the ‘lustful man’ in his earlier example. Let us suppose, contrary to Kant’s assumption, that this man decided to defy those who would

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give itself the law but only directions for a reasonable obedience to pathological laws.’ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Note that the chain of reasoning never actually stops, and the desire I identify as bedrock merely reflects my own limited understanding of my condition as a phenomenal entity.

<sup>70</sup> Korsgaard describes the idea that action results from the strongest desire as the ‘combat model of the soul’. See Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, section 7.1.2.

constrain him and choose the gallows. Kant would ask what this desperate defiance is based on. What is the incentive behind this decision? What maxim is the man acting on? It cannot be nothing, for without a reason there cannot be a decision (as discussed earlier). But what if this is the man's conception of freedom; a statement of independence? To this Kant would ask what kind of independence he is thinking of. If it is an independence that is *desirable*, then its worth will be measured against other desires, and as the consequence of this action (death) will bring an end to all his pleasure, we can confidently conclude that, were he to reflect properly, he would realise that this is not a decision he wants to make. On the other hand, if it is genuine freedom that the man is concerned about, then he must ground his action on something other than desire, and the only possibility – says Kant – is pure practical reason i.e. to be a person unconstrained by external coercion or influences, and so we arrive at Kant's conception of the moral law.

To summarise: morality implies freedom; freedom implies pure practical principles, so the moral law is the principles of pure practical reason. In this way 'freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other'. However, Kant believes that it is our awareness of duty that first alerts us to the need to posit the possibility of autonomous action.<sup>71</sup> He describes freedom as the *ratio essendi* of the moral law (it is a condition of the possibility of there being a moral law), and the moral law as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom (that which justifies the supposition that freedom exists).<sup>72</sup> In other words, Kant views morality as a universal human quality: it is something that all rational beings, as rational beings, are conscious of, and human freedom is something that is inferred from this moral awareness.<sup>73</sup>

#### 2.5.4 The origin of pure practical reason

I have explained Kant's conception of the moral law as the principles of pure practical reason by showing how these ideas related to his ontology. This ontology is based on the distinction he established in the first Critique between the two parts of the self (the phenomenal and noumenal). The phenomenal self is an 'object' of experience, and it is dependent for its existence on the noumenal self as the active unity that synthesises the information that constitutes its experience, and enables it to conceptualise its purposes. This noumenal self is

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<sup>71</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> So, he does not regard morality as derived from his philosophy. His philosophy is intended to address the perplexities and confusions that arise as the result of what he regards as the misuse of reason, as he explains in the introduction to the first Critique.

active in the formation of all practical principles, but has its own distinct ‘incentive’ to act on the moral law, because this represents its ‘true’ nature distinct from the mechanism of nature.<sup>74</sup>

A common objection to Kant’s position is that the notion of a ‘pure practical principles’ is too much ‘open to interpretation’. Any maxim, the argument goes, can be ‘universalised’ depending on the premises that are in place. I am going to digress briefly here to address this problem, as it may be applied also to Korsgaard’s theory which I discuss in the next chapter, and it relates to what I regard as the fundamental difference between the two positions. Consider again the example of theft that I have mentioned earlier. One could, it may be argued, reject the notion of private property, and argue instead that everything in the fridge is common property. Alternatively, I could acknowledge that my property is important to me, and that your property is important to you, but reject the claim that there is a principle stipulating that we respect each other’s property. All I need to do – the objection goes – is to incorporate the possibility of theft into the body of principles that govern my own life, and in particular my interactions with others. If I can accept that rule then there is nothing rationally inconsistent about my stealing from you. A further possibility is that I stipulate a difference between people that, for example, makes it acceptable for me to steal from you but not for you to steal from me. I might think, for instance, that it is ok for me to steal from you because I am more important than you. If I can hold this distinction consistently, against any objection that you or anyone else might raise, then it will validate my willingness to steal from you. It is worth noting here that historically policies of oppression have been justified by a proposition stipulating that the oppressed people are somehow different from the oppressors. It was, for example, considered acceptable for Europeans to enslave Africans because they were in some way ‘subhuman’.

One way of responding to these kinds of objection is to question whether the scenarios proposed are psychologically credible: could I really be so *hard* as to be unconcerned about the pain I cause another person in taking her possessions, or the pain it would cause me were it to happen to me? More to the point, could I regard this pain without any sense of moral indignation, i.e. without any thought that the thief *should not* have done this? In my view, Korsgaard’s theory reduces to these kinds of question. Kant however would not take this

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<sup>74</sup> Note that the corrective phrase ‘what if everyone did that?’, which is often cited as a colloquial version of the requirement of universalisability, only truly corresponds with Kant’s position if the expression is calling the person behaving badly (it is most often directed at children) to consider her reasons from an objective standpoint (i.e. apart from her subjective interests). It would not reflect Kantian morality if it is calling the person to consider the consequences per se. Harmonious, functional relationships are not the object of the moral law; the object of the moral law is goodness, which is identified in a pure will.

approach because it admits the inclusion of empirical criteria. He would maintain that in asserting any reason a person enters into the rational ‘order’ and by doing so makes oneself answerable to all the claims of reason and not simply those she chooses. For Kant, it is a fundamental, universal, and self-evident law of reason that a rational agent be respected as an ‘end in herself’ and never only as a ‘means to an end’. Kant regards this as so basic that he used it to express the whole of the moral law.<sup>75</sup> If one person’s reasons matter, then so must another’s; and their reasons must be negotiated normatively, i.e. in the domain of reason. This establishes an imperative to not interfere with the ‘ends’ that other people have chosen to adopt, so long as those ends are not themselves contrary to the moral law. In Kantian terms slavery is the most profound degradation of the person that is possible. The proposed maxim of making theft acceptable certainly involves interfering with another person’s ‘ends’ (unless of course it is unanimously agreed that the food in the fridge is really common property, but in that case there would have been no need to label it, and the action is no longer theft). ‘Universalising’ such an action would ultimately mean not respecting rational beings, and this – for reasons that may already be clear, and which I will elaborate shortly – would leave the thief no credible grounds for valuing himself.

I have outlined Kant’s understanding of the moral subject and how this is inseparably related to his metaphysics of causality and freedom. The key question in terms of the idea of wholeness that we are considering is how this ontology accounts for the value of a human life, and how that value is related to suffering. This is what I begin to discuss in the following section.

## 2.6 Moral and non-moral value

Moral value is the value of being virtuous and refers to the noumenal self. Non-moral value is the value of being happy and refers to the phenomenal self. This distinction is essential to Kant’s theory of wholeness, because he maintains that one has an absolute duty to be virtuous, and a secondary duty to be happy. For Kant, self-worth is established through virtue, and a person could never be whole without being virtuous. On his view, happiness without virtue is ‘hollow’, which is to say, not genuinely valuable. From this perspective, the value Wittgenstein attributed to his life – if it is genuine – must be related to his adherence to the moral law. The suffering that he experienced did not disrupt this self-worth because, according to Kant, virtue and happiness are essentially distinct. Ilych, on the other hand, did

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<sup>75</sup>Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 38-9.

not value his life because he was made conscious of his disregard for the moral law, and the happiness he experienced, however rich or refined, could not allay the misery that followed this realisation. That at least is how we may interpret their respective positions following Kant's theory. In this section I will explain in more detail Kant's distinction between virtue and happiness, and the way in which each was thought to be valuable. Having done this, I will then say what I think is wrong with Kant's theory.

Kant's insistence on the distinction between virtue and happiness is made clear in the following passage:

‘The majesty of duty has nothing to do with the enjoyment of life; it has its own law, even its own tribunal, and however much one wishes to shake them together, in order to offer the mixture to the sick soul as though it were medicine, they nevertheless soon separate of themselves; but if they do not separate, the moral ingredient has no effect at all, and even if the physical life gained some strength in this way, the moral life would waste away beyond recovery.’<sup>76</sup>

Happiness, as I have said, is achieved through the satisfaction of desires. For Kant, our interest in happiness is straightforward. Having a desire means being motivated towards a particular act; to have a desire *is* to be conscious of an incentive. Moreover, it is a task of reason to maximise our happiness by enabling us to experience greater and more enduring pleasures. This is the function of reason in regards our nature as ‘sensuous beings’.<sup>77</sup> Virtue, on the other hand, concerns the goodness of our actions, i.e. how our actions stand in relation to the moral law. A virtuous person is a good person, which means that his actions are not contrary to the moral law. Unlike happiness, our interest in being good is not straightforward. The great difficulty of Kant's ethics (Kant himself would describe this as the great difficulty of life) is that virtue and happiness do not necessarily agree. A person can be good but not happy and happy but not good. This raises a profound question: would a person forsake happiness for the sake of virtue? To what extent is it possible to do this? There are, as Kant points out, examples of people who do choose an action because they think it the *right* thing to do even though it causes them pain or unhappiness. The question is why?

The ‘goodness’ of goodness in the Kantian system is, as the passage above makes clear, totally distinct from the various degrees of enjoyment we experience from the

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<sup>76</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 92.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Certainly our weal and woe are *very important* in the estimation of our practical reason; and, as far as our nature as sensuous beings is concerned, our happiness is the only thing of importance...’ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 63 (original emphasis).

satisfaction of our desires. The moral good is good for us simply because it constitutes our being as free rational agents. In Kant's view, without morality we are nothing more than cogs in the great machination of nature, i.e. no more than a product of physical, chemical, biological forces, and our freedom is 'no better than the freedom of a turnspit, which when once wound up also carries out its motions of itself'.<sup>78</sup> This is, I suggest, a familiar sentiment, for there is still a widely held view or concern (as there was in Kant's time) that 'reductionist' science will ultimately debunk everything that is supposed to be 'special' about human existence (although there were and are some who would rather we embrace this conclusion and so shed all vestiges of what was and is regarded as a blend of superstition, hypocrisy, and oppression imposed by religion and maintained by phony metaphysics). For Kant, 'the law of pure will, which is free, puts the will in a sphere entirely different from the empirical',<sup>79</sup> and so provides us a mode of being that gives dignity and worth to human existence. Thus, the value of the moral law is that it establishes us as free and independent persons. This is the basis of its unique claim to respect and reverence.<sup>80</sup>

There is an oft quoted passage in the conclusion to the second Critique in which Kant eloquently summarises his veneration of the moral law:

'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.'

(Quotations often stop here, but what follows is more important because it explains why Kant finds the moral law wonderful and awesome:)

'I do not merely conjecture them and seek them as though obscured in darkness or in the transcendental region beyond my horizon: I see them before me, and I associate them directly with the consciousness of my own existence. The heavens begin at the place I occupy in the external world of sense, and broaden the connection in which I stand into an unbounded magnitude of worlds beyond worlds and systems of systems and into the limitless times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their duration. The latter begins at my invisible self, my personality, and exhibits me in a world which has true infinity but which is comprehensible only to the understanding – a world with which I recognise myself as existing in a universal and necessary (and not, as in the first case, merely contingent) connection, and thereby also in connection with all those visible worlds. The former view of a countless

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<sup>78</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 101.

<sup>79</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 90-1.

multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an *animal creature*, which must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came, the matter which is for a little time provided with vital force, we know not how. The latter, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as that of an *intelligence* by my personality, in which the moral law reveals a life independent of all animality and even of the whole world of sense – at least so far as it may be inferred from the final destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination which is not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaches into the infinite.’<sup>81</sup>

There is an almost hymnal quality to this passage; an element of personal investment not typically associated with the great ‘critical’ philosopher. In comparing the moral law with the starry heavens Kant is conveying the degree of worth he associates with his identity as a moral agent as compared with his identity as an ‘animal’ creature subject to various pains and pleasures. The moral law, he says, ‘exhibits’ him in ‘universal and necessary’ connection to a world of ‘true infinity’; a life beyond the contingent and animal, which allows him to infer a ‘final destination’ that ‘reaches into the infinite’. I will explain this inference to a final destination shortly. Before I do that, let us review what this tells us about the respective values of virtue and happiness, which – as I have explained – are basic to Kant’s theory of wholeness. Although Kant insists that virtue and happiness be kept as distinct ends, he does nevertheless acknowledge that they are connected in certain ways (albeit mostly negative). It is through these connections that the person is thought to be finally and wholly unified, and yet it is as we see the problematic nature of these connections that we perceive why Kant’s theory of wholeness is unworkable.

Kant sees that as sensuous creatures of need we are naturally drawn to satisfy our desires. This will often lead us to do things that are in conflict with our moral duty. It is this internal tension between the two aspects of our self that gives rise to the sense of duty, i.e. the feeling of being ‘morally’ obligated. A perfect being (God) whose will is always congruent with the laws of pure practical reason is not subject to obligation, and has no ‘sense’ of duty.<sup>82</sup> In regards to our sensuous nature, the presence of duty is a cause of pain because it requires us to abandon something we desire.<sup>83</sup> There are of course situations where our inclinations are in agreement with duty, but here Kant is clear that the moral worth of the action is dependent on the nature of our motivations (did I do the right thing because it was right or because I desired the outcome?), and is directly related to the degree to which our action is grounded on

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<sup>81</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 169 (original emphasis).

<sup>82</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 18 & 32.

<sup>83</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 76.

the moral law.<sup>84</sup> However, this does not entail that Kant thinks happiness is a bad thing. He readily acknowledges that we are creatures of need who ‘will’ (of necessity) to gratify our desires. There is nothing wrong with doing this so long as it does not conflict with the moral law. Kant in fact asserts that we have an ‘indirect’ duty to maintain our happiness, in order that we are more able to fulfil our duty (by means of wealth or talent) and less inclined to transgress it (because of need).<sup>85</sup>

The one positive *feeling* that Kant sees as necessarily associated with acting morally is the feeling of self respect. Kant describes this as a ‘peculiar’ feeling because it is unlike any other, being not of ‘empirical origin’ but ‘produced by an intellectual cause’, *viz.* the knowledge of having done one’s duty. It can therefore be known *a priori*, but it cannot be made the ground of our action, because that would be at odds with the purity of the moral law, from which it originates.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, it can arise in response to other rational beings in accordance with their virtue (though nothing non-rational, such as mountains, animals or heavenly bodies): a virtuous man, says Kant, in displaying the moral law, ‘strikes down’ all conceit and pretensions of greatness by bringing to mind our sole source of worth.<sup>87</sup> The sense of worthiness gained from self respect is something that Kant believes can remain with us irrespective of whatever else is happening:

‘In the greatest misfortune of his life, which he could have avoided if he could have disregarded duty, does not a righteous man hold up his head thanks to the consciousness that he has honoured and preserved humanity in his person and its dignity... ? This comfort is not happiness, not even the smallest part of happiness; for no one would wish to have occasion for it, not even once in his life, or perhaps would even desire life itself in such circumstances. But he lives and cannot tolerate seeing himself as unworthy of life. This inner satisfaction is therefore merely negative with reference to everything which might make life pleasant; it is the defence against the danger of sinking in personal worth, after the value of his circumstances has been completely lost. It is in effect of a respect for something entirely different from life, in comparison and contrast to which life and its enjoyment have absolutely no worth. He yet lives only because it is his duty, not because he has the least taste for living.’<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 75. See also *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 11-3.

<sup>85</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 97.

<sup>86</sup> Kant points out that children ‘feeling the power of their progress in judgment’ can fall into a form of moral competitiveness that often runs contrary to a pure regard for duty. *Critique of Practical Reason*, 160-1.

<sup>87</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 80-81.

<sup>88</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 91-2.

One could I think readily interpret Wittgenstein's life and dying remark in the light of this passage. The point that I want to focus on here is the way that it links virtue and happiness; and hence the way it sets up the problem of personal wholeness. In the passage Kant makes clear that he sees morality as making human life worth living, and also as making an individual worthy of happiness. This is the basis of Kant's notion of the 'highest good', or the 'perfect end', of practical reason: the agreement of virtue and happiness.<sup>89</sup>

Many would agree I think with the idea that people who behave badly are less deserving of happiness, while those who behave well are more deserving. This is a tenet of many conceptions of fairness. The question here is how this works out practically in Kant's system. Kant has provided a logical basis for this connection, in showing how the possibility of happiness is in many ways dependent on certain principles. As noted earlier, one could not have the desire for property *per se* without having a concept of property, and hence a capacity to use concepts, i.e. reason. Thus, rationally speaking, if I disrespect another person's property I am disrespecting the concept of property, and so my ability to claim property for myself. There are occasions when Kant explains the moral law in terms like this, such as when he says that an immoral maxim 'must destroy itself'.<sup>90</sup> So conceived the immoral person is a parasite who is himself part of the host he consumes, in that he enjoys the benefits of reason while undermining it. One may argue that this fits more-or-less with the common notion of worthiness that Kant applies to virtue, and moreover shows that virtue and happiness though separate in the phenomenal sphere are connected in the noumenal. However, the question is how this is practically worked out. If no thought of happiness is to be admitted to my respect for the moral law, then in what sense does the agreement of virtue and happiness as an 'ideal' affect my thinking? More fundamentally, how does the moral law relate to my 'individual' personality, if it is kept essentially distinct from the phenomenal details of my life? In the next section I will explain how Kant seeks to address these questions and why I find his answers unacceptable.

## 2.7 Final unity, perfect wholeness, and the problem with Kant's position

Kant's conception of unity hinges on the relationship between the 'noumenal' and the 'phenomenal selves'. Kant first conceived the transcendental self as the unifying unity that must exist in order for experience to be possible. This self becomes conscious of itself in experience and so seeks to understand its activity in the world through available concepts. In

<sup>89</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 116-7.

<sup>90</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 27.

this way the transcendental self becomes aware of the possibility of directing its actions in accordance with maxims and this awakens the sense of duty, which is the need to respect reason in its pure form, *viz.* the moral law. Thus Kant divides the self into two parts, the first part being the self as a rational decision maker and the second part being the self that is enacted in experience. The former has the capacity to act freely while the latter is determined either by the former or by the mechanism of nature (known through experience).

An individual personality for Kant *is* the self as rational agent, and thus action that is in accordance with pure practical reason is for him autonomous action, i.e. *self*-caused action. Adherence to the moral law *unifies* the person by bringing the self of experience into alignment with the self as a rational agent. A person is more or less *integrated* depending on the extent to which his enacted self conforms to the moral law, and *wholeness* is a state of perfect agreement. However, Kant does not think that wholeness is ever achievable in a mortal life: ‘the perfect fit of the will to moral law is holiness, which is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is at any time capable’.<sup>91</sup> This is because we are always vulnerable to external and internal pressures and exigencies of spatio-temporal life (our cares and concerns, hopes and aspirations), and there is no guarantee that these align with the requirements of the moral law. Nevertheless, Kant views the pursuit of wholeness (holiness) as the *perfect end* of the moral law. He therefore believes that it is a duty of every rational being to pursue its realisation, despite it being a goal that is unattainable in this present life.

Kant recognises that the apparent unattainability of wholeness threatens our ability to act morally, and so goes on to argue that in obedience to the moral law the virtuous person must ‘postulate’ the following: firstly, that his life will be never ending (i.e. that ‘the soul’ of a rational being is immortal) so that there is no temporal limit to his pursuit of holiness;<sup>92</sup> and secondly, that there is a God who is a just and omnipotent who will ensure that happiness is apportioned in proper accordance with virtue in some kind of afterlife.<sup>93</sup> These postulations are says Kant legitimated by the arguments of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he claimed to show that there is no *a priori* proof for *or* against the existence of God.<sup>94</sup> In the absence of a rational reason *not* to accept these ideas, the moral agent must take them on as beliefs under the imperative to pursue the highest good. This belief in a future existence in which virtue and happiness agree provides an interpretation of the ‘final destination’ that was

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<sup>91</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 128-9.

<sup>92</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 128-30.

<sup>93</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 130-8.

<sup>94</sup> In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant famously states that he had to ‘deny knowledge in order to make room for faith’. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

referred to in the passage cited earlier, ‘a destination which is not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaches into the infinite’.

Kant’s emphasis on the ‘highest good’ indicates that he was not indifferent to the apparent severity of his moral system. It is, on his view, *bad* if an innocent person is killed, and *right* that we should feel aggrieved when this happens. However, he is also convinced that lying in order to try to prevent this from happening is to forsake the basis of free action and get caught up in the mechanism of nature. We can never be sure that our lying could save this person; indeed, for all we know it could make matters worse. Our power is greatly limited, and it is hubris to think that we can *make* happiness accord with virtue, and wrong to attempt to do so if it means compromising the integrity of the moral law. Thus it seems the only acceptable response is to trust that God in his infinite power and authority will provide justice in due course.

There are serious difficulties inherent in Kant’s discussion of the highest good that when considered expose what I regard as the major flaw in his account of personal unity. To begin with, one may question whether a person can or should simply ‘choose’ to ‘believe’ ideas that are so substantial, that have such sweeping implications, purely because some of those implications seem coherent or desirable. In addition, the beliefs proposed are conveniently similar to the views of Kant’s own religion, and to those of the majority around him, which gives rise to the suspicion that Kant only proposed the postulates as a way of appeasing his religiously sensitive contemporaries, or perhaps even his own religious conscience.<sup>95</sup> I suspect that for these reasons alone the postulates are not often discussed by contemporary Kantians; Korsgaard at least tends to play down Kant’s apparent adherence to Christian doctrine. However, as I see it, the fundamental problem here is not epistemic, i.e. is not related to whether or not we are prepared to believe the postulates, but is rather moral.<sup>96</sup>

In short, I do not accept that freedom as Kant has characterised it – i.e. acting on pure practical principles – sufficiently describes the value around which a human life may be unified. Kant’s absolute insistence on the purity of the moral imperative effectively requires that a person regard all self-referring reasons as subordinate to the pure principles of the moral law (the formal character of one’s actions). This makes a person’s own understanding of who

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<sup>95</sup> Murphy, ‘The Highest Good as Content for Kant’s Ethical Formalism’, 102.

<sup>96</sup> Lewis White Beck argued that the postulates were unnecessary and contrary to Kant’s moral theory. See Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 242ff. Beck argued that one cannot coherently will the moral law purely for its own sake, i.e. ‘just because it is right’, and also will that happiness agree with virtue. I am not claiming that Kant’s position is conceptually incoherent (the two goals can be made coherent if one keeps in mind that virtue is primary (the supreme good) and the highest good is secondary (something to be willed after virtue). That is, I think Kant’s position is that we must be good, and where possible we must be good and happy, but we should never be happy and not good. My criticism targets the underlying normative claim, i.e. Kant’s explanation of why we should be good.

she is and what makes her life worthwhile (i.e. the understanding she has through the ‘phenomenal’ content of her concepts and desires) always subordinate to the moral law. As I have discussed, this prioritisation of the moral law over personal principles is based on Kant’s metaphysical understanding of what gives us freedom and hence dignity. For him, the moral law is what ultimately makes a person valuable as a person. In my view this is unsustainable. As I discussed earlier, it is through phenomenal experience that a person comes to know herself. Thus, a person cannot attribute value to herself and to her actions without some phenomenal material. Without a sense of self there is nothing for which a person can freely act, and so a person as pure *noumenon* cannot value freedom. To subordinate the value of the person to the value of the moral law is to leave the person with no positive incentive to act, much less pursue wholeness.

Kant of course did view the moral law as personally involving; indeed, he viewed as constitutive of having a personality. In the passage cited above he speaks of the moral law connecting him with a non-animal realm that is universal and necessary, a realm that reaches into the infinite. Yet my question is: who is Kant when we take away the phenomenal content of his life? Perhaps Kant would say that he cannot answer this, and indeed that he does not need to answer this because his noumenal life is kept by God who will ensure that his virtue is matched with the appropriate degree of happiness. Yet even if we were to set aside the epistemic problem I have mentioned and adopt Kant’s postulates, the problem of unity remains, because the unity of the individual is only achieved through external agency: the agreement of the two parts of the person (her virtue and her happiness) is contingent on the agency of God.<sup>97</sup> Even if the proposed eternal life was granted this problem would still remain. Thus the postulates do not establish genuine unity in the individual person. To understand how a person’s suffering and self worth incorporate her moral integrity we need an account of personal unity that shows how these are *necessarily* connected.

## 2.8 Freedom and value

While it seems difficult to comprehend Kant’s personal connection to the moral law apart from the postulates (and here I particularly have in mind the sense of personal ‘destiny’ he speaks of), the sense of awe and wonder he feels for the moral law may be grounded more simply in his metaphysics of freedom, which – as I have tried to show in this chapter – is the

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<sup>97</sup> I am aware that there may be a theological response to this (e.g. it may be argued that our true nature is not known through experience but is found in communion with God), but Kant cannot use the premises of such a response at this stage of his argument.

cornerstone of his conception of the moral law. The majesty of duty stands in contrast to the baseness of a predetermined animal existence. A key question then is how much of all of this might be altered by an alternative view of freedom.

Like Kant, I regard a concept of freedom as a necessary precondition of value and a precondition of moral action. As Kant observes, if an action is outside of my control then I cannot either be held responsible for it or dignified through it.<sup>98</sup> One would not esteem a person (including oneself) for actions that the person did not freely choose.<sup>99</sup> Yet because of his particular metaphysics of freedom Kant has only one way of accounting for the possibility of freedom, *viz.* pure practical reason. This, as I have explained, is what forces him to separate virtue and happiness. An alternative metaphysics may allow us to avoid this bifurcation. Or perhaps we do not need an account of freedom as such but simply the presupposition of freedom. It is worth noting here that when people think about their actions and what gives their lives value they very rarely think about whether their values and choices have been predetermined. This question is generally put ‘philosophically’, i.e. it is not thought to be directly relevant to one’s current way of life, not at least until certain conclusions are reached. Indeed, an interesting feature of this particular philosophical question is that one cannot coherently conclude that one is not free because the need to act, i.e. to make choices, always re-surfaces (total fatalism only works paradoxically as a self-inflicted condition).<sup>100</sup>

Of course, if one were convinced (as Kant was) that certain actions indicate a restriction of freedom then one may well avoid such actions. In this respect at least an account of freedom can influence our thinking about the kinds of choices that are possible,<sup>101</sup> and as I have noted adopting a different metaphysic would permit a different moral system than the one taken up by Kant.<sup>102</sup> An alternative metaphysics, *viz.* Spinoza’s, will be outlined in part two of this thesis. Like Kant, Spinoza presents freedom as constitutive of all value, but

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<sup>98</sup> One may, for example, try to excuse one’s behaviour by saying that one could not control one’s actions; one might say, for instance, ‘I am sorry I didn’t help, I was afraid’. To be overwhelmed by fear indicates a lack of choice and it is not right to blame the person for the actions resulting from the fear.

<sup>99</sup> There is no ground for respect (either from oneself or others) if the help I give someone is based purely on an ulterior motive.

<sup>100</sup> See Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 77-9.

<sup>101</sup> Kant’s claim that a person is absolutely free in respects of the moral law is a form of ‘negative’ freedom: to be free is to be undetermined. This is problematic in several ways, and practically speaking it seems to eliminate the notion of ‘extenuating’ circumstances in accessing guilt, for it implies that every person is equally free. A different account of freedom would provide a different account of culpability. I will come back to this in due course.

<sup>102</sup> Wittgensteinians tend to argue that ethics is prior to, or at least not beholden to, metaphysics. See for example Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 22-29. My position on the relationship between ethics and metaphysics is not precisely the same as Diamond’s, though as I said in the previous chapter, a proper discussion of this issue requires establishing an ontological and epistemological framework. My own view is that discussed in chapter five.

his understanding of freedom does not require a dualist conception of the self. In the next chapter I will discuss the position put forward by Korsgaard. In her theory, moral values are important because they are preconditions of all other values. I will argue that while this theory avoids an absolute separation of virtue and happiness, it does so by ignoring Kant's view of nature as a mechanism and the *noumenal* as distinct from nature. It thereby abandons the special character of moral value that Kant argued for and effectively makes moral value dependant on personal value. It therefore fails to provide a distinct account of the value around which a human life may be united.

Korsgaard's departure from Kant is reflected in the fact that she offers no restatement of the passages quoted above about duty being majestic and the moral law being a source of wonder and awe. This, I suggest, is itself reflective of the more typical view of the relationship of freedom in moral thinking, which I have just described. I do not think that the passages above would be inspirational for a person who did not also value her life for other reasons.<sup>103</sup> This is not to say that the question about how our status in the natural order leaves room for genuine freedom is unimportant. Freedom, as I have said, is an assumed precondition of responsibility and self-worth. The point is simply that the value of freedom cannot be abstracted from the value of the person.

In the next section I will attempt to illustrate this complex relationship between freedom, dignity, and personal values through two examples. These examples support key aspects of Kant's system, in particular the relationship between principles and dignity, and the need for those principles to be answerable to rational criticism. That is to say, they support the idea that acting on established principles gives value (or dignity) to a person's life. However, they also show the importance of personal identity in structuring those principles, and how pure practical reason in itself does not account for how principles become dignifying. In this way they illustrate the need to move beyond Kant's system in order to understand what unifies a human life and what sustains a person who is suffering.

## **2.8 Principled action and pure practical reason**

Kant arrived at his dual conception of the self because he was convinced that freedom can only be located outside of the causal order. This forced him to link autonomy to pure practical principles, which in turn split the self into 'natural' and 'transcendental' parts.

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<sup>103</sup> Kant, we can presume, was an exception. We may of course question whether his view was purely consistent. Would Kant have view the moral law as wonderful if either he did not value his life and did not find it possible to believe in the afterlife he envisaged?

Earlier I mentioned Kant's example of the lustful man who was threatened with death. Kant maintained that in so far as this man is thinking of his happiness he would always choose to restrain himself if doing so was necessary to escape the gallows, but that he could perhaps choose execution over telling a lie that would condemn an innocent person. He used this example to illustrate how questions of morality are different to questions of happiness, and how the sense of duty conveys the idea of freedom. I suggested that we could in fact imagine a person choosing execution in defiance of those who were prohibiting his pursuit of happiness, and relayed how I think Kant would respond to this suggestion. Kant, I suggested, would reject the idea that this could be a free choice because it is grounded in desire. He would say that though this man may think he is acting freely he is in fact a slave to his passions. This claim, I now want to argue, is problematic, and to illustrate why I am going to introduce two analogous and yet more substantial examples of apparently 'principled' defiance.

In a 2007 TV adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, Fagin (played by Timothy Spall) is offered clemency by the Judge presiding over his trial on the condition that he publicly renounce his Judaism and convert to Christianity. Amidst the hostile crowd, under the gaze of the Judge who is visibly enjoying the pain this offer causes him, Fagin, the iconic figure of calculating criminality, quietly replies "I cannot do that". This scene is a departure from the original novel and the character is admittedly shown in a more sympathetic light, but nonetheless it is credible. It is not fanciful to imagine that there would be a limit to what a character like Fagin would do in order to be 'happy' (in this case in order to stay alive), and I think most would agree that a principled decision of this kind is in some way dignifying (or at least that an acquiescence would be undignifying). Yet it is difficult to fit the value underpinning this principled action within the Kantian schema. It would be very odd to say that it is in service of his happiness, but it is also hard to see it as a necessary aspect of who he is as a rational being. Fagin's Jewishness is – on Kantian grounds – a contingent part of his identity; it is part of his identity in the phenomenal world.

A Kantian might reply that in this situation the 'pure principles' involved are about the duty to stick to one's convictions and resist oppression. Beliefs or convictions would cease to mean anything if people simply abandoned them as soon as it became expedient to do so. Thus, there is a moral duty – which Fagin acts upon – to maintain one's beliefs even when it is difficult, unless one has *rational* grounds for changing them. Thus, the *important* thing here, one might argue, is the right of the individual to hold his or her own beliefs as *her* own beliefs and not as commanded by another. This is certainly a credible way of describing the

universal values involved (i.e. why Jews and non-Jews alike might think it right that Fagin does not accept the offer). We might all agree that there are important principles at stake here (besides the articles of the Jewish faith, whatever Fagin understood them to be), and that by upholding these principles Fagin asserts his freedom and shows a measure of dignity. My question is whether this adequately captures the value as it is known to Fagin: why he says he cannot do this. Fagin, I suggest, is not thinking first about the supremacy of his moral duty, or even the need to make a rationally credible response to this offer, but about what it means for him to be a Jew. To this a Kantian may of course reply that he *should* think first of the moral law and the need to be guided by reason. Such a response is always available whenever a practical example appears to contradict a particular moral theory: one can say that the individual is wrong not the theory. Yet such a response does not explain the value that is manifest in the example, and so it does not provide an answer to the questions I have started with, i.e. what gives a person's life unity and how does that unity give her life value? My claim is that an example like Fagin's is more typical than an example like Kant (i.e. Kant as a person who evidently did find some sustaining value in his pure conception of the moral law). Thus, I am convinced we need to look beyond Kant's theory for answers to these questions.<sup>104</sup>

A comparable but rather more complex example of a principled stand before the gallows is found in the trial of Adolf Eichmann, famously recounted in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Throughout the trial Eichmann refused to acknowledge any guilt on his part for the Holocaust, despite the overwhelming evidence showing his role in organising the transportation of Jews across Europe to Nazi concentration camps. He did not attempt to deny his involvement in the massive logistical operation – quite the opposite: he spoke proudly of his skill and the status he gained within the Nazi party – but nevertheless he denied that this made him guilty of genocide. At one point, he tried to claim that he had acted in accordance with Kantian precepts and in particular in accordance with Kant's definition of duty.<sup>105</sup> Eichmann was of course found guilty and hanged. Arendt says that he died with dignity, and yet also provides an interesting account of his confused grasp of the principles on which he was standing. This is her description of his moments prior to his execution:

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<sup>104</sup> Note that I have not here offered an alternative account of why Fagin's choice is dignifying; I have merely noted that it intuitively seems so, and have claimed that Kant's system does not adequately capture why. I will return to this example later in chapter four.

<sup>105</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 135-7. As Arendt points out, Eichmann was not able to make his claim convincing, and later said that once he had begun working on the final solution he ceased to act on Kantian principles, and indeed ceased to have control of his actions, i.e. to act autonomously (Arendt also discredits this amended defence).

‘He began by stating emphatically that he was a *Gottgläubiger*, to express in common Nazi fashion that he was no Christian and did not believe in life after death. He then proceeded: ‘After a short while gentlemen, *we shall all meet again*. Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, long live Argentina...’ In the face of death, he had found the cliché used in funeral oratory. Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick; he was ‘elated’ and he forgot that this was his own funeral.’<sup>106</sup>

It seems that by invoking a set of principles Eichmann was able to maintain some kind of self respect, and to face his death unafraid. The problem here is that the invocation is incoherent (having just denied an after life he says he will meet his audience again), and that he appears to have lost sight of the fact that *he* is the one that is about to be executed; he is ‘carried away’ by his sense of oratory (in her book Arendt notes Eichmann’s life long fascination with oratory and the ‘elation’ he received from what she called ‘winged words’). This raises doubts as to whether Eichmann’s death exhibits genuine ‘dignity’, despite his composure, and despite what Arendt says.

From a Kantian perspective, one might argue that Eichmann achieves a kind of pseudo dignity by standing on his convictions and yet fails to achieve genuine dignity because those convictions do not align with the moral law. Nazi ideology is not universalisable. This again seems to me a credible interpretation, and yet it is limited as an account of Eichmann’s personal situation and the confused nature of his actions, and thus limited as an account of what finally unified his life. Raimond Gaita offers a richer interpretation that seems compatible. He says that Eichmann’s principled stand is not dignified because his principles are meaningless. Eichmann’s words, says Gaita, are ‘grotesquely sentimental’.<sup>107</sup> They are ‘hollow’, failing to have a ‘proper’ regard for truth; the kind of attention to reality that is required in order for words to become meaningful. While they may have elevated Eichmann in his own mind, to the observer they show him the consummate fool. Thus, Gaita will only admit that Eichmann ‘tried to die with dignity’, and he says that he cannot understand why Arendt says that he did.<sup>108</sup>

Gaita’s appeal to meaning and truth agrees with the Kantian view in so far as these concepts are linked with test of universalisability that identifies a pure practical principle. It invokes a level of evaluation that is independent of a person’s subjective or individual ‘preferences’. In this respect it offers a Kantian like description of the evil of Eichmann’s life (i.e. ways of saying why his actions were evil despite his apparent conscientiousness) and his

<sup>106</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 252.

<sup>107</sup> Gaita *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 306.

<sup>108</sup> Gaita *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 302.

failure to die with genuine dignity (if we accept Gaita's interpretation). Yet it goes further in describing the nature of his moral failing and consequent lack of integrity and failure of dignity. In contrast to Kant's idea of pure practical reason, the notion of 'meaningfulness' involves a sense of individual or personal value. The distinction between 'truth' and 'mere sentiment' is not captured simply in the act of will but concerns the way that an agent takes account of her actions and her situation. These considerations do not require a total separation of 'virtue' and 'happiness' as per the Kantian framework, i.e. a separation between the value(s) through which one is integrated and one's personal commitments or attachments, and it is not immediately clear how they are to be incorporated into Kant's theory of personal unity. Even if they can it does not seem that his theory contributes to our understanding of cases like Eichmann and Fagin, as it does not help us to understand how particular 'meanings' relate to the way a person's life is unified, valued and free.

As we shall see, Korsgaard's redevelopment of the Kantian view of unity does connect with the notion of personal meaning, and in chapter four I will discuss specifically how Gaita's characterisation of Eichmann's death may be integrated with her theory. According to this theory a person's life is unified by the principles that she has personally committed to, and by her ongoing faithfulness to those principles. The moral law, in this system, is a necessary subset of those principles. The question is where this leaves the *distinctive* value of moral action (which Kant insisted on). In chapter three I will argue that Korsgaard's position does not provide any distinct conception of value and that we therefore need to rethink the basic Kantian ontology. This is the basis of my move to Spinoza.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The influence of Kant's philosophy is visible in many areas of modern thought. It is relevant to this discussion because it provides the basis of a theory of wholeness that is put forward by Christine Korsgaard. In this chapter I have outlined Kant's account of the moral subject and his theory of wholeness, and argued that while drawing what appears to be a useful link between principled action, autonomy and the worth of the individual, his theory turns on a conception of morality that is, in a word, unrealistic. The principles that unify a person are not the principles of pure practical reason and Kant's conception of autonomy as the value underpinning our duty to these principles is not what typically 'holds a person together'. Eichmann and the version of Fagin that I described display choices that are evidently 'dignifying' and yet not grounded in respect for 'pure' principles (though interestingly there

are questions over whether Eichmann is actually dignified or only attempting to be). These issues will be picked up in the proceeding discussion and critique of Christine Korsgaard's account of wholeness, in which it is argued that a person is unified by acting on the principles that are constitutive of her identity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTEGRITY THROUGH PRINCIPLED ACTION: THE NEO-KANTIAN SUBJECT

The value of a person's life is not straightforwardly related to her suffering. A person may continue to value her life despite considerable suffering. This may be explained by understanding how a life 'as a whole' can continue to be valued over and above the events that occur within it. This explanation requires that we have an understanding of what it is that unites a person's life, such that it can be regarded as a whole to be valued.

'The human project', says Korsgaard, 'is self constitution',<sup>109</sup> or 'unity'.<sup>110</sup> Self constitution is achieved, on her view, by acting in accordance with the principles that comprise what she calls a 'practical identity': a self-description under which the person finds herself, her life, and her actions worthwhile. A person is more or less unified (or 'constituted') according to how well the reasons underlying her actions cohere with her practical identity, which is in turn related to the overall coherence of her practical identity (because an incoherent self-description will generate incoherent reasons). This task of self-constitution includes what we ordinarily think of as our ethical work; both the work that is done in ethical discourse, where we attempt to build our lives around coherent principles, and the effort that is required to *will* oneself toward integrity amidst the various impulses or desires that pull us in multiple directions. Thus, according to Korsgaard, a person who is 'striving to be good' is in fact 'striving to be unified, to be whole'.<sup>111</sup>

Following Korsgaard's account of wholeness, we may understand Wittgenstein's dying remark as indicating that he saw his life as structured around principles that he continued to value. What he valued as he was dying was congruent with what he valued throughout his life, and hence he could value his life 'as a whole'. Ilych, by contrast, suffered at the end of his life – i.e. he was not whole; he saw life as 'wrong' – because in his illness he no longer valued the principles he had lived by. However, unlike the theory put forward by Kant, Korsgaard's theory does not specify which principles unify a person's life, and thus it does not tell us what it was about the principles that Wittgenstein lived by, and the

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<sup>109</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 25.

<sup>111</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 26. As this quote indicates, Korsgaard does not distinguish between unity and wholeness. I will suggest a possible distinction that follows her account later in the discussion.

principles that Ilych lived by, that accounts for their respective outlooks. In the next chapter I discuss the ways that Korsgaard's theory may be extended to address this deficit, and indicate how these extensions are still limited. On this basis I propose the need to approach the questions through a different ontological framework.

In this chapter I explain Korsgaard's theory and why I think it lacks a distinct account of value. In the first section I discuss her foundational claim that our agency is grounded in reasons and indicate its phenomenological basis. In the second section I discuss her move from rational agency to rational identity. Her central argument is that by deciding to act on reasons we become *identified* with those reasons, and through a process of rational decisions form a conception of who we are and what we value, i.e. a practical identity. It is this connection between rational decision and self-conception that forms the basis of her theory of personal unity. As a practical identity is formed it assumes a role in 'governing' our decisions, such that we become conscious of an impulse to act in ways that cohere with that identity. This impulse, says Korsgaard, is obligation. It operates as an internal normative drive toward wholeness, or unity; a drive to think of ourselves and act in ways that are rationally coherent. I explain how this account of wholeness may fit with the narrative of Ivan Ilych, and indicate what implications it may have for our understanding of wholeness. This brings us to the question of which values best serve to maintain unity. In other words, what principles should a person build her identity around so as to enable wholeness? In Kant's theory the value that underpinned a person's self-worth was autonomy through the moral law. In my view, Korsgaard's theory cannot maintain the same unique moral value. In the third section I outline Korsgaard's notion of a moral identity, which underpins her account of moral obligation, and her additional 'private reasons argument', which forms the basis of my discussion in chapter four. In the remaining sections I indicate the limitations of her theory, and explain why her account of moral obligation does not describe a distinctly 'moral' value.

### **3.1 Self reflective rational consciousness**

Korsgaard's view is that we are unified by our rational decisions. She says that in acting on a reason a person identifies with that reason. On her view, a person is constituted by the reasons that she acts upon. She is therefore *autonomous*, i.e. free, and values her actions, in so far as she acts on reasons that conform with her identity. This conception of autonomy is

different from Kant's, who saw autonomy as grounded in pure practical reason, which was outside of what he saw as the mechanism of nature (of which our desires were a part). Nevertheless Korsgaard maintains, like Kant, that the value of autonomy is foundational to moral value. It is therefore important that we carefully consider the basis of her conception.

There are two key assumptions in Korsgaard's conception of autonomy. The first is that self-conscious reflection is motivated, i.e. characterised by an impetus to act. The second is that self reflective action is actualised through the deployment of a reason. This means that the self reflective consciousness acts by choosing a reason on which to act. In Kant's terminology, these ideas refer to the spontaneity of thought (i.e. the active impetus), and the need to ground our decisions on 'maxims'. In the previous chapter I noted that one cannot act deliberately without 'thinking' in some way; e.g. by reacting intuitively or instinctively, but maintained that these would only be regarded as 'our' actions if they can be rationalised in a way that connects them with our conscious reasoning. Here I am going to discuss these ideas in more detail, in the light of their place in Korsgaard's overall theory.

### **3.1.1 Self reflection as motivated**

When we think about consciousness we typically think of 'awareness' or perception, along the lines of the classical empiricists. It is that which is occurring when a person is awake. Sleep is usually regarded as an exemplary state of *unconsciousness*, dreaming aside. Kant moved us beyond this conception by describing the ways that the mind is active in forming conscious experience, and by explaining why experience cannot be straightforwardly conceived as information that is 'given'. This activity of the conscious mind includes what we describe as self awareness: the conscious agent's awareness of his or her agency. It is, one might say, the awareness of one's awareness, or the consciousness of being conscious. Inherent to this activity is a sense of control: a control over what may be called the 'direction' of one's 'awareness'. To illustrate, consider a task like driving a car. One must be conscious to drive a car. One must be aware of the car, the road, and of other vehicles on the road, etc. However, it is possible to drive without thinking about the act of driving, i.e. without thinking about what one is doing. Self conscious awareness is different. It involves a sense of control and focus, usually directed at a particular 'object'. Hypothetically, anything could become the object of such awareness: one can reflect on what kind of day it is, the time until lunch, the structure of a sentence, how to prepare for a future trip, Kant's relationship to Aristotle, the tone of one's voice, the smell in the air, and so on and so forth. The distinction that is of

interest here is the sense of directed control that is not present in consciousness more generally.

Reflective consciousness tends to be intermittent, and usually interrupts an ongoing activity. One can be conscious for long periods of time without being reflectively conscious. Consider how it is when watching television: here the mind can be occupied processing an array of complex information and yet one hardly notices that it is happening. The mind is aware but unreflective. It is not immediately clear what prompts us to become reflectively conscious, or whether there could be a definitive answer to this question. At one level reflection appears to be governed by a kind of spontaneity. Thoughts often come to us unbidden, and often move in directions unexpected and uncontrolled. Sometimes the causes of our reflective thoughts appears obvious (such as when somebody puts something immediately ‘in front of your face’) whilst at other times the cause can only be postulated. It seems that many thoughts come to our conscious awareness via unconscious perceptions or promptings.

There is little in Korsgaard’s theory that could explain where and why reflection starts. The question is important because it relates directly to her theory of agency and unity. It may be that she gives little attention to it because it cannot be easily accounted for in the Kantian framework. We cannot regard self conscious reflection as a part of experience, i.e. phenomena, and so it cannot be attributed to a preceding ‘event’. It must therefore be conceived by the Kantian as belonging to the noumenal, which means that the Kantian cannot account for its genesis, but only confirm its existence. One of the advantages of Spinoza’s approach is that it does provide an account of how reflection is initiated, as he conceives consciousness as having the same substance as the body, and as being affected in thought (and also *effecting* thoughts) as the body is affected in space. This is explained in the discussion of Spinoza’s theory in chapters five and six. The key points in terms of Korsgaard’s theory are that reflective consciousness is controlled by the person and that the person is motivated in executing this activity. When I reflect, it is *me* who is thinking, and not some ‘other’ that is thinking through me; and it is *my* interest to see that the reflection is completed in a satisfactory manner. To see how this is foundational to Korsgaard’s theory of wholeness, we must consider how she relates this sense of personal agency to our use of reasons.

### 3.1.2 Reflection and reasons

As we think about what is governing the direction of our reflective thoughts and subsequent actions it is easy to fall into a form of homuncularism whereby the self is conceived as a separate entity directing its thoughts by remote.<sup>112</sup> If the link between reflective consciousness and the identity of self is to be useful it must be explained how the identity of the person is present in those thoughts. Korsgaard's view is that reflective consciousness operates through rational deliberation. In this respect her position is the same as Kant's. To illustrate, suppose I am crossing the road and remember certain documents I have left behind in my office. This initiates a process of reflection through which I consider how important the information might be, what might result from not having the information, how much time I have, what is likely to happen if I am late, and so on. All of these thoughts are part of a rational process, directed at answering a particular question, *viz.* what should I do? Each thought is a particular 'reason' in a chain of reasoning, and what I conclude from this reasoning is the reason that I act upon. In Kant's practical philosophy, this link between reflection and rationality is assumed in the link between reasons, intentions and responsibility; it is why a person is held to account for the reasons that he or she acts upon. This notion of accountability links the person with her actions, and – more specifically – with her intentions, which are identified through her reasons. This connection only makes sense if a person is somehow identified with the reasons that she acts upon.

Note that this claim that rational deliberation is the primary means by which reflection operates does not require that *all* self-conscious reflection is resolved with an answer. Sometimes reflection is interrupted, perhaps because we are distracted or lack the mental energy to complete the rational task we have set ourselves. This does not contradict the link between reason and reflection; it simply indicates that reflection can sometimes fail to achieve its goal. Similarly, reflection may not bring us to a clear conclusion, but rather to the awareness that we lack certain information, or that our present understanding is not sufficient to make a decision. We might say, for instance, that we need to 'think a little further' before making a decision. Once again, there is no need to regard these possibilities as contrary to the general thesis, as we can simply regard this decision as different to what was anticipated: a decision that more information is needed or that more thinking needs to be done.

Also note that while rational deliberation is the *primary* way in which reflective consciousness operates, it is not the only way. There are other forms of reflection that do not

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<sup>112</sup> A homuncular argument is one which attempts to explain something, e.g. the nature of a person, by means of that which it seeks to explain, e.g. a smaller person (a homunculus) within the person.

operate according to reasons, such as when we fix our gaze or attention on a particular object or situation. We can, for example, focus our senses so as to pick out something that we believe to be present and yet cannot perceive. Or we can attend to our feelings so as to experience them more fully, to apprehend their nature, to modify them so as to make them ‘manageable’, or to relate them more widely to things we consider important. Or we may simply make ourselves alert in a particular setting, so as to be ready to receive whatever information happens to arise. These forms of focussed awareness are not maintained by reasons as such, but are nevertheless ways in which a person may be reflectively active. One might argue that that they all require reasons in order to be initiated, e.g. that before I can focus on an object I need to say to myself: ‘focus on this’. However, while this may be true of many cases, there are clearly some cases where our attention is prompted by non-rational drivers.<sup>113</sup>

This last point is important because it indicates that we cannot equate the reflective self solely with the reasons that he or she acts upon. There must, in other words, be more to a person than her reasoning. Thus, an account of the self based wholly on an analysis of the reflective self’s relationship to reasons will be incomplete. This is another advantage of the Spinozistic approach over the Kantian: Spinoza provides an analysis of the multiple ways that the agent is affected; an analysis that includes rational and ‘non-rational’ elements (and yet which also accounts for the centrality of reason). However, this is not to negate the value of the Kantian position: it remains true that a person *is* in significant respects identified with her reasons in the ways that I have mentioned, and the Kantian framework provides a very useful explanation of this. As I explain in the next section, what Korsgaard shows is how the process of rational decision making is *constitutive* of a person being who she is.

### 3.2 Korsgaard on self-constitution

In Korsgaard’s analysis, to act on a reason is to identify with that reason. This identification, she says, unifies the person. A person disintegrates whenever she acts against reasons that she has identified with, unless she is able to ‘reintegrate’ herself by acting on countervailing reasons. This view is grounded on her view that rational decisions are ‘self legislating’. Her analysis is summarised in this passage:

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<sup>113</sup> We could consider here the various ways that animals can focus their attention; think for instance of a predator focussed on its prey. It is difficult to say whether such attention is reflective, and whether it would qualify as intentional. The animal is clearly conscious, but is it aware that it is conscious? I am not going to address this question here, though the broad analysis of consciousness that is being considered is obviously relevant to such a discussion.

‘The reflective structure of the mind is a source of ‘self-consciousness’ because it forces us to have a *conception* of ourselves. As Kant argued, this is a fact about what it is *like* to be reflectively conscious and it does not prove the existence of a metaphysical self.<sup>114</sup> From a third-person point of view, outside of the deliberative standpoint, it may look as if what happens when someone makes a choice is that the strongest of his conflicting desires wins. But that isn’t the way it is *for you* when you deliberate. When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which is *you*, and which *chooses* which desire to act on. This means that the principle or law by which you determine your actions is one that you regard as being expressive of *yourself*. To identify with such a principle or way of choosing is to be, in St Paul’s famous phrase, a law to yourself.’<sup>115</sup>

The reflective structure of the mind forces us to have a conception of ourselves, firstly because we need reasons to act – or at least to make decisions (as discussed above) – and secondly because we cannot use a reason without placing ourselves under the reason. This point was discussed in the previous chapter when I described how the noumenal self perceives ‘herself’ in the phenomenal sphere and applies concepts to herself. We do this as we think about our actions. In using reasons we must be able to think of ourselves, for example, as spatially located (i.e. ‘here’ in relation to ‘there’); or as experiencing certain pains and feelings (e.g. ‘hungry’, ‘tired’, ‘angry’, ‘excited’, ‘curious’ etc); or as having certain interests and projects (e.g. ‘after I wake up I watch television and eat breakfast’, ‘when I am five I will go to school’, ‘when I grow up I want to be a philosopher’). We must think these ways as we consider, e.g., reasons to move, sleep, eat, look, plan, anticipate, think, study, work, etc. The more sophisticated our reasons, the more sophisticated our self-conception must be.

The need to have a conception of ourselves is, says Korsgaard, what generates normativity (obligation) and the drive towards integrity. These arise from the *generalising* (i.e. unifying) character of any self-conception, joined with our personal endorsement (i.e. positive evaluation) of the pattern of thought or action set out in those conceptions. As discussed in the previous chapter, a concept (and hence also a reason) is a rule for bringing together particulars. This means that when we choose to act on a reason we impose unity on

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<sup>114</sup> This is, as I hope will be clear from the previous chapter, a questionable interpretation of Kant’s position in regards to the ontological status of the ‘self’. In epistemic terms, Kant described the idea of a ‘freewill’ as something that must be a postulated (i.e. that could not be proven). See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 395, and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 53-4. However, as I try to show, in *moral* terms he is committed to the idea that his rational self has an existence independent of his ‘phenomenal self’. Korsgaard, preferring what I would describe as a naturalistic reading of Kant, describes these two selves as merely internal and external perspectives of the same thing. This leads, as I shall argue, to a considerably different moral outlook.

<sup>115</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 100.

our ‘particular’ actions. Without this imposition of unity our actions would be fragmented or dissolute. Thus, in acting rationally we commit ourselves to certain patterns of thinking and acting.<sup>116</sup> We cannot neglect these commitments without acting against ourselves, i.e. undermining our own *authority* as a self-determining agent. It is in this respect that acting on reasons is self-legislating.

To illustrate, suppose I have a project that I want to finish and I perceive that there are certain tasks I must undertake in order to do it. In taking on this project I must have endorsed certain reasons, and in so doing committed to a certain course of activity. Suppose that I perceive the necessary tasks as difficult, and this produces an impulse to abandon the project. In this situation my consciousness of the initial reasons for undertaking the project, and also any other reasons that may now be relevant, will generate a competing impulse, *viz.* the sense of ‘duty’, to undertake the tasks and thereby complete the project. Whether or not I do is then ‘up to me’; it is, on the Kantian analysis, my ‘choice’ whether to follow the impulse to quit or the duty to follow through on my commitment. If I quit I fail to ‘live up’ to a certain self-conception, i.e. I fail to be the person I thought myself to be (at least in this one conception). Of course, I may rethink my situation, and reject the initial reasons for taking on the project, but this calls for an alternative way of thinking about myself (who am I if I am not doing this?). To simply abandon a certain self-conception creates what we might term an ‘existential vacuum’. It somehow dismantles us personally.

The sense of an existential investment in our self-conceptions is, I think, recognisable. There is a natural impulse in most people to act in ways that are congruent with some kind of a coherent self-conception, or at least to conceptualise themselves in ways that they can reflectively endorse, and a natural aversion to anything that threatens this chosen conception. Even those who use narcotics such as alcohol to suppress their rational awareness still tend to rationalise that action in ways that enable them to ‘feel good’ about themselves (i.e. they present reasons to justify the activity). If we cannot endorse our own actions, then we lose self-respect, which in its more extreme forms leads to self-hatred. Korsgaard’s argument is that this need to act out a self-conception that we can endorse is the basis of all obligations, including moral obligations.

Responding to her argument in *The Sources of Normativity*, Thomas Nagel asks Korsgaard why a ‘self-determining will’ could not choose to ‘determine itself in individual, disconnected choices as well as according to some consistent law or system of reasons?’ He was asking, in other words, why we need to remain committed in the ways that I have

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<sup>116</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, section 4.5.1.

described. Why can a person not continually change the reasons she has identified with? Korsgaard replied as follows:

‘...if *all* my decisions were particular and anomalous, there would be no identifiable difference between *my acting* and *an assortment of first-order impulses being causally effective in or through my body*. And then there would *be* no self – no mind – no me – who is the one who does the act.’<sup>117</sup>

This response, I think, shows convincingly that there is a universal need to act on some or other reasons, and hence to have some minimal self-conception. This in turn shows that obligation, at least in some minimal sense, is universal. Everyone is subject to some or other normative requirement; everyone in using reasons is obligated in some way. However, it is not clear whether this formal account of obligation creates a universal drive toward integrity. We can perhaps imagine such an absolute loss of self by extrapolation from the more intermediate states that we are familiar with,<sup>118</sup> and it is clear that this would be a terrible situation to be in; yet this does not show which reasons we should commit to. Most of us it seems live with only partially coherent self-conceptions. Most of us are only more-or-less ‘rational’ in our behaviour. We all fail to follow through on certain commitments, fail to see certain implications of our reasons, change our minds, and so on. How many times can I ignore my obligations, or change my mind, and still have a sufficiently robust identity to make decisions, and to value my life? Korsgaard, in my view, does not have a general response to such questions. In her account, once an identity is established, it is bound together by the values that are internal to the reasons involved. She maintains, in other words, that we are constrained by our sense that there are certain things that are important in our commitment to certain reasons. Thus, my commitment to, for example, keep promises is ultimately governed by my judgement that keeping promises is important.<sup>119</sup> This is highly relevant to Korsgaard’s theory of wholeness (and indeed to her account of *moral value*)

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<sup>117</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 228. See also Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, section 4.4.3. ‘If you have a particularistic will, you are not one person, but a series, a *mere heap*, of unrelated impulses. There is no difference between someone who has a particularistic will and someone who has no will at all.’ This means, argues Korsgaard, that there is – strictly speaking – no such thing as a ‘hypothetical’ imperative, conditioned on the presence of a certain desire. To will anything is to commit to a form of unity, and so to be categorically obligated. See also Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, section 4.3.4.

<sup>118</sup> An example of this might be Korsakoff’s syndrome, which involves an extreme failure of self-narrative due to crippling amnesia. This is however a condition with certain biological bases; Korsgaard is imagining a moral basis for the same sort of condition.

<sup>119</sup> Note that this does not reduce the value of honesty to a desire (such as ‘I like honesty’, as per the theories known as ‘expressivism’ or ‘emotivism’); this is a judgement that involves deep, rationally structured dimensions of human existence.

because it is these sorts of evaluations that determine a person's capacity to hold herself together. I will explain this in more detail later in the chapter. In the next section I describe the typical developmental trajectory of a person's self-conception, and introduce Korsgaard's notion of a 'practical identity'. This will convey something of the scope of evaluative judgements, and how such judgements are central to her theory of wholeness.

### 3.2.1 The development of a 'practical identity'

In early childhood the conceptions that are applied to us are for the most part not self-conceived but applied by others. Others, such as our parents and siblings, see us in certain ways and apply concepts to us accordingly. We are taught to recognise emotions, to attribute certain qualities to ourselves, to think of our lives as having certain kinds of potential, and so on and so forth. For Korsgaard, we identify with those reasons as we consciously decide to act upon them. For example, we can consider the breakfast we were brought up eating, and choose to eat something different. We can recognise that in certain situations we behave in certain ways, and decide that we would prefer to behave differently. We can consider the career that was planned for us, and choose to pursue something else. The primary issue is not whether or not we are *able* to enact our choices, as that depends on a range of factors, such as the resources that are available. The point is that in making these choices we express who we are, and so define our identities.

The model of identity that Korsgaard is proposing is not that of a static entity, but is rather dynamic and evolving.<sup>120</sup> On this model the self becomes more or less integrated through a procession of choices. This starts with the organism's earliest forms of conscious awareness. Conscious awareness, even in its most primitive forms, is fundamentally evaluative: it requires that we value one path among the paths available. Thus, even though the identity of an infant is not yet formed through self-description, she is nevertheless able to make what we might call 'proto-choices' through basic bodily impulses and reactions, such as searching for a mother's face, crying in response to pain, eating in response to hunger, and so on.<sup>121</sup> Later, as her personality is developed through the acquisition of meanings, she becomes conscious of her environment, herself, and the ways that objects behave and relate. This greatly increases her ability to consciously reflect on her responses, and so greatly enhances the kinds of evaluations she can make. Moreover, it allows her to unify experiences at diverse times and achieve a kind of 'narrative' integrity. Thus, through using meanings a

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<sup>120</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, section 2.4.2.

<sup>121</sup> Korsgaard discusses the distinction between rational and non-rational action in chapter 5 of *Self Constitution*.

person becomes able to make ‘reasoned’ evaluations, which are structured by the rules governing those meanings and hence governed by a sense of ‘reasonability’. For Korsgaard, this is the process by which a *person* emerges and develops.

To illustrate: at certain time during my preschool years I was told that I must not lie. This instruction formed who I am in so far as it shaped my thoughts through certain meanings, and hedged my actions through the exertion of certain pressures (even if it were only the pleasure or displeasure of those around me). However, my own agency only truly emerged (on Korsgaard’s account) when I began to think about this for myself, apart from those external pressures.<sup>122</sup> Now I can think, for instance, about how I feel when honesty is required of me, the risks involved in being honest, how certain consequences will affect ‘me’ and those I care about, and so on and so forth. I can also consider what I think about other people who lie (i.e. how I ‘evaluate’ them), and apply the same evaluative standard to myself. Through this process of judging how certain rules (in this case rules about honesty) apply to myself I emerge with a conception of myself who acts in certain ways and not others. If I judge that it is ‘not right to lie’ and act accordingly then I think of myself as an ‘honest person’. Yet it is not just that I *think* of myself in that way; the point Korsgaard wants to emphasise is that in so far as that conception determines my actions, I *am* an honest person.

Korsgaard describes the collection of meanings that comprise one’s overall self-conception as a ‘practical identity’. She defines this as ‘a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking.’<sup>123</sup> She notes that most people’s practical identity will include a collection of various categories, titles, roles, and standards, e.g. being a man or a woman, a father or a mother, a teacher or a student, a member of a certain organisation, an adherent of a certain religion, a human being, a lover or a friend, etc.<sup>124</sup> She describes a ‘practical identity’ as providing ready ‘incentives’ to act in certain ways and not others.<sup>125</sup> In this sense practical identities might be described as repositories of reasons that are operative as we reflect on and direct our actions; concepts that immediately bring to mind a particular set of reasons. For example, thinking of myself as a father makes me conscious of certain duties, concerns, and hopes. It gives me, for example, a reason to be conservative of my wealth so that I can

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<sup>122</sup> Here the faculty of judgement that Kant identified as basic to human understanding is applied to the ‘self’ as an ‘object’ of phenomenal experience; an object comprised of phenomena that are hidden from others, and thus are ‘inner’ or ‘subjective’.

<sup>123</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 101.

<sup>124</sup> I think it is significant that most of these identities that Korsgaard mentions involve a certain kind of engagement with others, as this – as we shall see – is a central aspect of the account of value that is offered by Spinoza.

<sup>125</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 22.

provide for my children. Similarly, in thinking of myself as a citizen of a democratic society I am aware of a reason to vote. If I thought of myself as a professional sportsperson that would give me reason to exercise. Etc.

Korsgaard does not claim that our ‘practical identities’ are always present before our minds as we think about what to do. It is not usual for a person to first think ‘Who am I? What do I value?’ and then having answered these questions begin to think about the reasons that follow. A practical identity is most often only implicit in our practical reasoning, perhaps only partially articulated, and incompletely examined. Its governing role is generally unconscious, though it may be altered or developed as we reflect ethically. Moreover, a person’s practical identity is not typically developed in advance of her choices. More often it is stumbled upon in the course of life. We find ourselves doing certain things and think of ourselves in ways that fit these activities. Korsgaard notes that most people have a practical identity that is a ‘jumble’,<sup>126</sup> of concepts assembled from disparate and disordered sources and which are therefore only more or less coherent. However, whenever we become conscious of this incoherence we are faced with conflicting reasons, e.g. reasons to keep a promise or pursue one’s own projects, and this forces us to make choices that involve either rejecting one part of our practical identity in favour of another, or finding a way of resolving the conflict (perhaps through a form of compromise). In so far as this is done successfully, i.e. in a way that one can continue to endorse oneself and one’s actions (bearing in mind that this decision sets a precedent for subsequent decisions), one moves towards a more coherent identity.<sup>127</sup>

### 3.3 The problem of wholeness as the problem of value

As we have seen, Korsgaard’s view is that in order to integrate my identity I must act on coherent reasons. If I fail in this then I am rendered ineffectual (i.e. unable to act), and ‘at odds’ with myself (i.e. guilty, or lacking self-respect). She does not distinguish between unity and wholeness. I suggest that a distinction might be drawn around the difference between one’s overall identity and one’s ability to act in this or that situation. Considered this way, unity (or integrity) refers to the coherence of one’s actions over the course of one’s life. Wholeness refers more specifically to a person’s ability to ‘reflect successfully’ in a given situation. That is, it is the ability to reflect on one’s current state of activity and think ‘yes,

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<sup>126</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 101.

<sup>127</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, section 6.4.2.

this is good'.<sup>128</sup> She is not whole as she hesitates, doubts, deliberates, or frets about what to do. In these moments the person is being pulled in different directions by conflicting reasons. She is restored to wholeness when she 'makes up her mind', or 'pulls herself together', by deciding what reasons she will act upon (which reasons she will endorse as *her* reasons). There are two parts to this process of 'reunifying' the self. First there is the practical deliberation which brings one to a decision<sup>129</sup>, and second there is the act itself. To decide and not act is to remain in a state of internal dissonance, a state that is felt in the sense of obligation, which is the conscious manifestation of personal disunity. This dissonance arises from the constitution of the individual agent, i.e. it is a tension between the agent as legislator and the agent as the power that must execute the laws that are given.<sup>130</sup> On this critical point Korsgaard's position differs to Kant's, who held that the primary tension for us as autonomous agents was between our subjective desires and the objective requirements of pure practical reason.

Though Korsgaard offers her theory of personal unity as an answer to the fundamental questions of moral philosophy, her position is equally applicable to our understanding of suffering, and the value of a whole human life. This application is signalled in a discussion of pain in the second part of chapter four of *The Sources of Normativity* (and also suicide, which I will come to at the end of this chapter). 'Pain', argues Korsgaard, is both a 'sensation' and 'the perception of a reason', *viz.* the perception that something is wrong and needs to be changed, or – in other words – the perception that there is something threatening one's sense of what makes one's life worthwhile.<sup>131</sup> It is, simply put, 'bad': it cannot be endorsed and therefore repels us. These remarks correspond almost precisely with Cassell's definition of suffering. If suffering is the perceived threat of disintegration, and wholeness is having a reason to act (being able to reflect successfully), then we can also describe suffering as the perceived absence of reasons or the perceived threat to reasons that we currently act upon. In other words, a person suffers because she does not know how to act in the situation she is in.<sup>132</sup> She does not know how to act because her 'practical identity' does not present her with reasons that would form the basis of an action she values.<sup>133</sup> Equally, a person is able to remain 'whole', even while ill or dying (i.e. she is able to cope well) if her practical identity

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<sup>128</sup> "Reason' means reflective success'. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 97.

<sup>129</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 126.

<sup>130</sup> See Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, chapter 7.

<sup>131</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 147-53.

<sup>132</sup> Korsgaard notes that as a sensation pain can interfere with a person's ability to think and act, and hence it can itself become a threat to one's identity.

<sup>133</sup> Cassell observes that patients suffer less when they are able to understand their pain, i.e. when they know what is causing it and when or how it can be controlled. Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 35.

continues to present her with reasons she can endorse. In this way, a person may express gratitude for her life ‘considered as a whole’ (as Wittgenstein did), as her practical identity remains coherent even in the anticipation of death.

One practical implication of the account of wholeness just outlined is an imperative to reflect on one’s mortal condition, one’s vulnerability to illness and loss, and to consider the value of one’s life in the light of these inevitabilities. Something like this is suggested in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Early in the story Tolstoy describes Ilych as being unable to reflect on his own death, and suggests this to be a significant factor in his suffering:

‘Ivan Ilych saw that he was dying, and he was in continual despair.

In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.

The syllogism he had learnt from Kiesewetter’s Logic: “Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal,” had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius – man in the abstract – was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate from all others. He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya ... “Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me, little Vanya, Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it’s altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible.”

Such was his feeling.

“If I had to die like Caius I would have known it was so. An inner voice would have told me so, but there was nothing of the sort in me and I and all my friends felt that our case was quite different from that of Caius, and now here it is!” he said to himself. “It can’t be. It’s impossible! But here it is. How is this? How is one to understand it?”

He could not understand it, and tried to drive this false, incorrect, morbid thought away and to replace it by other proper and healthy thoughts. But that thought, and not the thought only but the reality itself, seemed to come and control him.<sup>134</sup>

This I think indicates one way of interpreting Ilych’s belated realisation that his life had been ‘wrong’, which I introduced in chapter one: it was wrong because it was spent in denial of his

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<sup>134</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych & Other Stories*, 110.

mortality (one might reasonably argue that this is an aspect of Tolstoy's own interpretation of his character's suffering, given this passage of the narrative). This implies that if Ilych had confronted his mortality earlier he would have lived somehow differently, and not have been as miserable as he was.<sup>135</sup> Following Korsgaard's account of wholeness, we might say that Ilych's practical identity was almost totally disrupted by his illness. He could no longer do the things that made his life worthwhile, and had no way of valuing his present situation; he had no reasons on which he could act. Indeed, his dying somehow contradicted the value of his 'previous' way of living; made it seem 'wrong', made it seem a 'lie'. If we were to generalise this analysis, we would expect such suffering to arise for anyone whose practical identity somehow contained a refusal of mortality or of one's susceptibility to illness, and which thereby could not conceive life as valuable when these eventually threaten.

There are I think several applications that one might make of this apparent insight about human nature, and I will discuss some of these in the next chapter. However, it is limited in that it does not in itself explain how a person's life can have value amidst these realities. It does not tell us, for example, what Ilych may have done differently having acknowledged his mortality, or how this alternative way of life might have made things easier, or what Wittgenstein thought that made his death bearable. It has been said that we live in a 'death denying culture', and yet it is not clear what it would mean to 'acknowledge' the reality of death.<sup>136</sup> It surely involves more than simply inserting one's own name in the major premise of the syllogism. The difficulty, both theoretical and personal, is to conceive the value of one's life in a way that is sustained in the light of this reality.

As outlined so far, Korsgaard's theory of wholeness does not provide a general theory of value. It rests on the fact that people evaluate the reasons that are presented to them, i.e. on the independent subjective evaluations of the rational agent. It does not tell us how the values that emerge from these evaluations relate to a person's suffering. In the previous chapter I explained Kant's view that a person may be sustained by the feeling of self-respect that arises with virtue. Given that Korsgaard is claiming to be simply restating Kant's position,<sup>137</sup> one should expect there to be an equivalent feeling of self-respect attached to her reformulation of the moral law. I will argue that there is not, and thus that her theory does not offer a general response to the question of how a person is able to value her life despite her suffering. In the

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<sup>135</sup> Wittgenstein, by contrast, thought it very important to reflect on one's mortality, and there are instances in his life where he was pointedly doing so (such as his actions as a soldier in World War I, and his subsequent reflections on these events). He also happened to enjoy Tolstoy.

<sup>136</sup> For an overview see Zimmermann and Rodin, 'The denial of death thesis: sociological critique and implications for palliative care', 121-128.

<sup>137</sup> See for example Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, section 3.4.8.

next section I outline her reformulation of Kant's moral theory. This involves two further arguments; the first is called the 'argument from humanity' and the second is called the 'private reasons argument'. I will then proceed to explain why this is not simply a restatement of Kant's position, and how it does not maintain the same distinct sense of moral value that Kant attributed to virtue. I conclude from this that we must go beyond Korsgaard's theory for an account of value that answers my questions.

### 3.4 'Humanity': The moral identity

Following her discussion of rational structure of human agency, the need for a practical identity, and how this generates obligation, Korsgaard then concedes that there is 'a deep element of relativism in [her] system... for whether a maxim can serve as a law still depends upon the way that we think of our identities ... different laws hold for wantons, egoists, lovers, and Citizens of the Kingdom of Ends.'<sup>138</sup> In her view, 'how we think of our identities' is in part determined by individual choice ('you may stop caring whether you live up to the demand of a particular role'), and in part by fate ('you are that way because of the way that life has fallen out').<sup>139</sup> For example, I might have been born into a different community or family, I might have resolved not to have children, and I could resign from my job if wanted to. Korsgaard notes that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a European could 'admonish another citizen to civilised behaviour by telling him to act like a Christian'.<sup>140</sup> This remark would not generate the same sense of obligation among Europeans today because it is no longer the case that the majority of Europeans include 'Christian' as a part of their practical identity. Korsgaard describes these dynamics of identity as the 'stuff of drama', and yet they cannot, in her view, be the stuff of morality, because she maintains the Kantian idea that moral obligations are universal and necessary. She concludes that in order to show that there are moral obligations it must first be shown that there is an identity that is universal and necessary, i.e. not the result of chance, and which must always, necessarily, pass the reflective test no matter who applies that test.

The traditional Kantian method of identifying universal and necessary truths is through transcendental analysis, i.e. analysis of the conditions that make something possible, in this case human agency. Accordingly, Korsgaard attempts to show that there is a universal

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<sup>138</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 113.

<sup>139</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 120.

<sup>140</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 101.

and necessary identity through a transcendental analysis of the conditions of the possibility of acting on reasoning. This analysis is very simple:

1. A person must use reasons in order to act.
2. A person who uses reasons must, if she reflects appropriately, identify herself as a person who uses reasons.

*Therefore:*

3. Any person who acts must, if she reflects appropriately, regard herself as a person who uses reasons.

In its expanded form, the argument is that a person who reflects adequately, i.e. thinks about who she is in a logical manner, will acknowledge that she is necessarily ‘a reflective animal who needs reasons to act and live’. Whereas all the other aspects of my identity are particular or contingent this aspect is universal and necessary, because whatever else I do or am I cannot stop using reasons and hence cannot stop thinking of myself as ‘an animal who needs reasons to act and live’. Any reasons that emerge from this identity are also universal and necessary; they are not merely rules but *laws* after the classic Kantian definition.<sup>141</sup> Thus, it is these reasons, says Korsgaard, that comprise ‘the moral law’ (they are her account of Kant’s ‘principles of pure practical reason’). She attributes the emergence of this identity to the intellectual ‘enlightenment’ of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and hence she describes her moral theory as confirming ‘enlightenment morality.’<sup>142</sup> More specifically, she equates this identity with the Kantian notion of ‘the Kingdom of Ends’, which is also described as Kant’s formula for humanity. Hence, Korsgaard describes this moral identity as the identity of being human.<sup>143</sup> To recognise oneself as a moral being is to identify oneself as a member of the party ‘humanity’, or ‘a citizen in the Kingdom of ends’.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.4.1 ‘The private reasons argument’

Korsgaard is concerned that someone might object that the above argument only shows that I have an obligation to respect *my* humanity, not the humanity of others. To counter this argument, she adapts Wittgenstein’s famous ‘private language argument’ to show that reasons cannot be ‘private’ in this way. In the private language argument Wittgenstein maintains that

<sup>141</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A 127.

<sup>142</sup> See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 121 & 123.

<sup>143</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 121.

<sup>144</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 115 & 122.

it is impossible to have a language (or even a sign) that is fundamentally unintelligible to others. His argument, in short, is that if there is no external criteria that I can refer to in using a word – criteria that are at least in principle accessible to others – then I could never know whether or not I am using the word correctly or incorrectly. The same is true, says Korsgaard, of reasons. If a reason can be intelligibly applied to me, then it must involve criteria by which it could in principle be applied to others. So, if reason tells me (e.g. through the argument from humanity) that my humanity necessarily matters, then it also tells me that your humanity necessarily matters. I cannot arbitrarily decide that humanity as it is instanced in me is important but not as it is instanced in others. I may, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter, try to claim that some people (e.g. people like me) are more important than others, by specifying some relevant differences between these people and others. However, given the private reasons argument, this difference must also be rationally defensible accordingly to publicly accessible criteria.<sup>145</sup> Failure to rationally sustain this purported difference means that I cannot reflectively endorse any actions that it is based on. Korsgaard offers the following example of a failed attempt to sustain this kind of difference (at least we are meant to take it as failed):

‘She says, ‘My career is just as important to me as yours is to you, you know. I have ambitions too.’ He says, ‘It isn’t the same thing for a woman.’ What isn’t the same? Does ‘career’ mean something different to her? Does ‘ambition’? How about ‘important’? Or (let’s get down to brass tacks) how about ‘I’?’<sup>146</sup>

This is an ethical argument; it involves normative claims that are invoked through the ‘exchange of reasons’ (as Korsgaard describes it). It illustrates how a person thinks ethically simply in attempting to justify his position (‘it isn’t the same for a woman’), which we all do because we all need to ground our actions on reasons (this being the way that we direct our reflective consciousness). In this particular argument a cluster of concepts are being exchanged to justify and then refute a position that involves ‘her’ sacrificing her career so that ‘his’ may be advanced. A key question in regards to this argument – which Korsgaard presents rhetorically – is why these concepts should mean something different for a person who happens to be a woman compared with a person who happens to be a man. If this question cannot be answered then the argument collapses, and the man advancing it must

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<sup>145</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, section 4.2.

<sup>146</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, section 4.2.11. This is one among a number of such examples.

concede that his conclusion is not justified. To continue as he proposes would mean acting on unjustifiable reasons.

### 3.5 Disintegration as the price of immorality

Having set out Korsgaard's account of moral obligation, I will now address her central claim that unity is the goal of morality, and disunity the price of acting immorally.

Korsgaard argues that failing to act on the reasons that are presented through one's practical identity means failing to be oneself (given that one is constituted in one's practical identity). If I continue to fail in this way over a sustained period then I cease to be who I am (or was), and if I fail completely such that I have no principles left then I cease to be anything other than a 'heap' of impulses and reactions. Thus, in Korsgaard's analysis, failing to act amounts to failing as a person – or rather – failing *to be* a person.<sup>147</sup> A person can of course change her mind (repent of her decisions), and so change her identity (perhaps because she becomes aware of certain 'bad' implications). However, for Korsgaard, this possibility is constrained by 'the moral identity': I cannot change my mind about being 'human' (a being who needs reasons to act and live). Thus, any actions contrary to the moral identity will necessarily compromise my integrity.

Let us consider how this might play out in the situation just described. Here the man is confronted with a choice: he either admits that he is wrong to say his career is more important than the woman's, or admits that he does in fact believe that a man's career is more important than a woman's. Each option entails certain implications. The first option may bring a certain degree of shame, and may mean abandoning certain career aspirations. The second option will probably alienate the woman he is talking to. It also raises further questions regarding a woman's worth, intelligence, station, power, potential, and so on and so forth, which he may or may not consider at this time. Irrespective of whether he does think about these implications, the choice he makes defines his identity and so 'goes with him'. Suppose then that he takes the second option, offends the woman he is talking to, and they sever ties. The next time he meets a woman, and is faced with a logically related decision regarding, say, the value of her career, her intelligence, status, power etc. (whatever is logically connected to his initial decision), the same issues and questions will arise. While it may be that he can somehow hide his 'true' thoughts from other people so as to avoid being seen as a 'chauvinist', he still has to 'live with himself'; the principle (something like: a

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<sup>147</sup> This is the central theme of *Self Constitution*; for summaries see pages 24-5 and 129-30.

man's career is more important than a woman's) is enmeshed in his thinking, and so will in certain ways affect every subsequent act of reflection which his rational faculties identify as relevant. Most significantly perhaps (for him at least), it will affect how he thinks about himself. To think of a woman, or a woman's interests, as somehow worth less than a man's, one must – as mentioned – maintain some relevant difference between the genders, and this difference is thereby bound up with one's sense of what makes one's *own* life or interests important. Thus, if a man's interests are thought to be more important because, for example, men are thought to be more intelligent, then it follows that a *man* lacking intelligence must be also worth less in same way. So, anything that threatens this man's belief that his intelligence is superior (e.g. an intelligent woman) will also threaten his sense of self-worth, or self-respect. The only way he can avoid this is by suppressing his rational faculties, perhaps by inattention or distortion, but a mind so disintegrated is less able to make decisions and so – on Korsgaard's account – less autonomous.

Among the reasons that the above example is interesting is that it indicates the ways that certain reasons can pervade a person's thoughts and action (we might describe these reasons as more critical or central than others), the multiple ways that reasons may be interpreted, and also how our reasoning may be subject to the power dynamics in relationships and socio-cultural pressures. These aspects of practical reasoning are hardly mentioned in Korsgaard's analysis (probably because she considers them subordinate to the reflective powers of the individual rational agent), but nevertheless I think it important to mention them here as I regard them to be highly relevant to the way that we conceive the value of our lives. This importance will emerge more clearly once we move to Spinoza. In the next section I digress briefly to indicate what these aspects involve, before going on to explain what I think is the fundamental problem with Korsgaard's conception of morality.

### **3.6 The contested boundaries of reasonability**

As should be evident, Korsgaard's claim is not that reasons are 'shared' in the sense of everyone having the same reasons for acting. As with the publicity of meaning (which is shown by the private language argument) the 'public accessibility criteria' of reasoning is not that people will always comprehend one's reasons, but only that they could, given adequate time and experience. So, if I make an ethical claim that others do not agree with, it is not expected that others should automatically see whether or not my position is 'reasonable'; rather there is an expectation that I will make some effort to explain myself. The rational

structure of our decision making, and the public nature of our reasons, establishes a standing expectation that we make our behaviour intelligible, and basic ‘civility’ requires that we articulate – so far as we can – a mutual understanding, whereby certain reasons *are* shared and our differences are accommodated (this is the condition of any social group, from the state to the family; interaction is not possible without agreed rules of behaviour and agreement in judgements). Where this discussion breaks down, relationships are governed by power rather than obligation.

I believe that power has a significant and perhaps unavoidable role in ethical discourse and in our individual thinking. However, it seems that for Korsgaard this influence is not intrinsic to the character of reasons, and occurs only because we are imperfectly rational. She distinguishes obligation from *mere* force or pressure, and argues that ‘the relation in which moral claims stand to us is a relation of authority, not one of power’.<sup>148</sup> Being compelled to do something, perhaps out of fear or out of a desire to please the person giving a command, is not the same as acting from a sense of duty. Duty comes from a sense of obligation, and this, says Korsgaard, only arises through an act of reflection, which is to say, a conscious recognition that the reason or reasons involved are ‘right’. If a reason is merely forced on a person, and she cannot or does not see that reason as right, then that reason has no authority in the person’s mind. She may obey it, but not because she thinks she ought to (unless of course it is by way of other reasons, such as the reason to avoid punishment, but these reasons may also be subjected to reflective scrutiny).

This distinction between obligation and compulsion can be very difficult to unravel amidst the complexities of personal motivations and interpersonal relationships, particularly relationships involving unequal power and/or moral experience. To illustrate, consider a child being told to get ready for school. In the child’s mind this will involve a mixture of recognised duty and submission to parental power. Duties can in turn involve a range of reasons and these may or may not correspond with the reasons of others; in this case, the child’s reasons may or may not correspond with the parents’. Children often feel a sense of duty because they have at some level ‘endorsed’ the thought that they should do what their parents tell them to do. Hence, a child may not have thought at all about *why* she should go to school, but nevertheless feel *obliged* to do so because she thinks she ought to do as her parents say.

I think that the broad issue of power, reason and obligation is more productively dealt with under the Spinozistic framework rather than the Kantian, because in the Spinozistic

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<sup>148</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 30. In making this point she references Joseph Butler. See Butler, *Five Sermons*, 39-40.

framework the will does not involve this sharp distinction between obligation and force; obligation is a kind of force operative in the agent; the question is whether this force is internal or external to the agent's constitutive power of acting. However, this does not negate the connection between reflective endorsement and the sense of obligation, which Korsgaard says is the basis of obligation. Whilst it is true that people can act on half considered and only partially coherent reasons, people are also capable of asking 'why' a given reason should be enacted. It is this capacity that is of primary interest to Korsgaard, because in her view it is when this capacity to question is exercised that the 'person' exercises authority over herself (her innate 'right' of self-governance) and so becomes truly obligated.<sup>149</sup>

The complexities involved in the relationship between power and reason concern a more difficult and perhaps more significant issue: the nature of reason itself. What determines whether or not a reason is reasonable? Who specifies, for example, the criteria for using a term like humanity? I will revisit this issue in the next chapter, and return now to the question of value which I said earlier was pivotal to Korsgaard's account of wholeness. I said earlier that Korsgaard does not offer a general account of the sort of value that may enable a person to remain unified, even while ill or dying (the sort of value Wittgenstein appears to have and which Ilych lacks). I have outlined Korsgaard's account of moral value, and her argument for the shared nature of reasons. Given that Kant thought that moral living brought with it a form of self-respect that would sustain a person who had 'not the least taste for living', we may also expect that Korsgaard's account of moral obligation may engender a similar sense of value. My view is that her account of moral value is in fact a departure from Kant's, and that it does not involve any distinct kind of value, but at best a set of values that are derivative of, and dependent on, the values that are intrinsic to our individual practical identities. Her conception of value is, by her own admission, ultimately paradoxical, for she concludes that value only exists if life is worth living. To resolve this paradox I propose that we attempt to develop an alternative theory of value, so as to move towards a better answer to the question of how 'a life as a whole' may be valued.

### **3.7 The value of 'humanity'**

In the previous chapter I set out the link between Kant's metaphysics, the moral law, autonomy, and dignity. In Kant's conception the moral law is comprised of pure practical principles, and these principles are totally separate from our individual desires. He was

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<sup>149</sup> See for example Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, section 2.5.3, and all of Lecture 3.

committed to this conception because he regarded the world of ‘phenomena’ as mechanistic. This means that actions can only be ‘free’ in so far as they are grounded in something outside the world of phenomena. Korsgaard scarcely mentions the phenomena-noumena distinction, and settles for what might be called a much more common-sense understanding of freedom, whereby an action is deemed to be free if it expresses the agent’s own decision.<sup>150</sup> This means that she cannot attribute the same special quality of ‘freedom’ to moral choices that Kant did; moral choices are instead rendered as merely a species of choices amongst all the other choices that we make. They are choices that relate to her notion of a ‘moral identity’, which is the identity of a being that needs reasons to act and live, or, as Korsgaard would have it, the identity ‘humanity’. Nevertheless, Korsgaard continues to describe ‘moral value’ in classic Kantian terms: as the primary value from which all other values arise,<sup>151</sup> and as the ‘end’ that is an ‘end in it itself’. She takes this to be proven by the transcendental argument that valuing one’s need for reasons is a condition of the possibility of all other values. I believe that a careful reading of her work reveals an equivocation as to the exact nature of this value, and in particular on the question of whether it makes a person’s life worthwhile, and that this reflects the broader limitations of her naturalistic interpretation of the Kantian framework. In this section I will explain what this equivocation involves, and indicate the key passages where it is most evident.

To recap: the argument from humanity is that we are all obliged to value ourselves as beings who need reasons to act and live, because any act of value entails that we think of ourselves as such beings. Being such a being is a condition of the possibility of reasoning. This establishes, says Korsgaard, a universal imperative to be ‘oneself’. One cannot coherently choose to not be oneself because in thinking that choice one must attribute some value to it; one must in other words, *want* to not want to be oneself, and hence one still has a positive conception of oneself. However, the question is whether this in itself is a source of self-worth.

When Korsgaard introduces her argument for the moral identity in *The Sources of Normativity* she admits that ‘most of the time our reasons for action spring from our more contingent and local identities’. However, she goes on to claim that the value of those identities is ‘in part’ derived from the value that we place on ourselves as beings *who need* those identities. Her thought is that in recognising myself as a being that needs reasons, I

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<sup>150</sup> In many ways her position resembles Aristotle’s, in that she regards an animal as acting freely (after a fashion) when it acts according to its nature. We are rational animals, and so it is in our ‘nature’ to think and act rationally. However, she also argues that the capacity for rational self reflection establishes a distinct kind of freedom. See chapter five of *Self Constitution*.

<sup>151</sup> See in particular Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 121-2.

also recognise that I must have some or other practical identity. For example, I can choose what job I train for, such as whether I will be a doctor or a lawyer (presuming I have the requisite abilities); what I cannot choose is that I adopt some kind of role that gives me reasons. The former is contingent, the latter is necessary. Having adopted one or the other role or job – e.g. having trained as a doctor – it becomes necessary that I remain committed to that job as the source of my reasons. In this way my chosen profession becomes necessary for me. In this way Korsgaard argues that ‘all value depends on the value of humanity’.<sup>152</sup> I think this is a misleading conclusion. I think that the dependency is rather the other way around.

It is true, given the public nature of reasons, that a person in using reasons is thereby bound to respect that process of reasoning and the value of reasons to other persons. I cannot reason on my own, in that respect I must respect ‘humanity’ as Korsgaard defines it: I must respect the importance of reasons to individuals and thus the importance of rational engagement over, say, the exercise of force (this may be described as *respect* for the processes of ethical debate). However, this obligation to value humanity is itself dependent on a person being committed to reasons that give worth to her life. It seems to follow that if a person was not able to form a particular identity, or she was suddenly cut off from her particular identity, she would not have reason to live. It may be true that she always has a reason to find a reason (in this respect ‘humanity’ *is* the primary value), but this awareness of a need for reasons would not in itself constitute a practical identity (a description under which she regards her life as worth living etc). Respect for the process of reasoned discussion and the importance of reasons would not itself give value to her life, would not give her reasons to act, and thus would not help her to remain ‘whole’.

This objection to Korsgaard’s characterisation of the ‘moral identity’ raises some difficult questions about the ethical implications of her theory. For example, she says that a soldier’s duty to obey orders is secondary to the morally ‘fundamental’ value of humanity, and so he should not kill innocent people even if ordered to do so.<sup>153</sup> Most of us would agree, but is that because of our ‘humanity’ (as Korsgaard defines it) or because we value our lives. If the latter, then suppose a person is convinced it is necessary for innocent people to die in order to uphold or preserve certain values that she believes are *essential* to her practical identity? This is, I suggest, one way of characterising the reasoning of a suicide bomber (or at least a kind of suicide bomber). Is such a person obligated by her humanity (as defined by Korsgaard) to think otherwise? Note that the question here is not whether we find the

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<sup>152</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 121.

<sup>153</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 102.

reasoning abhorrent; it is *why* we find it abhorrent. These ethical implications of Korsgaard's 'argument from humanity' are not central to our present discussion, but they are closely related, in that they concern our most important values: those principles that 'hold us together'.

Interestingly, Korsgaard seems to acknowledge that the moral identity is not itself a source of value when she considers the problem of suicide. She begins by noting that there can be different reasons for suicide, some of which may count as 'good': 'the ravages of severe illness, disability, and pain can shatter your identity by destroying its physical basis, obliterating memory or making self-command impossible. She says that in such cases suicide may be the only way to 'preserve your identity and to protect the values for which you have lived'.<sup>154</sup> However, she then distinguishes a particular kind of suicide whereby people are suicidal 'because they feel that they themselves are worthless and, as a result, that life has no meaning and nothing is of value.' This seems to me a difficult distinction, and there is not likely to be unanimous agreement about the reasons she has offered for the former case. Nevertheless, at a formal level the distinction is fairly straightforward, *viz.* that there are reasons for suicide which we might endorse and reasons which we should not endorse. The latter kind is prima-face immoral (given her account of obligation); a view which has of course been held in numerous religious traditions and by a number of philosophers.<sup>155</sup> She then links this kind of suicide with her claim that humanity is the fundamental value by suggesting that this form of suicide is not a rejection of a particular value but of 'value itself'. It is here that the equivocation becomes evident, for she then immediately proceeds to discuss how it is difficult to say that a person who does this is doing anything wrong, because such a person does not acknowledge any reason whatsoever, and so has no sense of right or wrong. There is, she concludes, no argument against practical scepticism because having reasons fundamentally depends 'on what we do with our lives, as individuals, and on what we do with our world, as a species. There is no way to put the point that is not paradoxical: value only exists if life is worth living, and that depends on what we do.'<sup>156</sup> So once again it appears that 'humanity' is not in fact a distinct or fundamental value but rather a value that is dependent on

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<sup>154</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 162.

<sup>155</sup> Korsgaard cites Bernard Williams' comment about suicide being a 'defeat for humanity', (Williams, *Morality: an Introduction to Ethics*, 2), Kant's declaration that not committing suicide is the most basic duty because 'To annihilate the subject of morality in one's own person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world' (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 218-9) and Wittgenstein's remark that 'suicide is the elementary sin' because ... 'If suicide is allowed everything is allowed. If anything is not allowed then suicide is not allowed' (Wittgenstein, *Notebooks, 1914-1916*, 91).

<sup>156</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 163.

the existence of another kind or kinds of value, and hence it is not a value that can keep us whole (and moreover it allows there to be a credible morality of suicide bombing).

There is one further passage that I wish to consider in relation to this question of a fundamental, universal value. This passage appears at the conclusion of Korsgaard's most recent work; it is worth quoting at length because it involves an expansion of the conception of humanity for which she has previously argued. Following a short summary of her earlier position on the value of humanity described above, she offers the following restatement:

‘Part of what I am saying now is that when you come to see that your contingent practical identities are normative for you only insofar as they are endorseable from the point of view of your human identity, you also come to have a new attitude towards your contingent practical identities. You come to see them as various realizations of *human possibility* and *human value*, and to see your own life that way: as one possible embodiment of the human. Your life fits into the general human story, and is part of the general human activity of the creation and pursuit of value. It matters to you both that it is a particular part – *your own part* – and that it is a *part of the larger human story*. What you want is not merely to be me-in-particular nor of course is it just to be a generic human being – what you want is to be a *someone*, a particular instance of humanity. So it's like this: in being the author of your own actions, you are also a co-author of the human story, our collective, public, story. As a person, who has to make himself into a particular person, you get to write one of the parts in the general human story. And then – at least if you manage to maintain your integrity – you get to play the part.’<sup>157</sup>

In this passage Korsgaard is adding to her earlier claim that ‘life’ is a basic value the further thought that a human life is about ‘realising *human possibility*’, and that the value of a human life comes from a connection to other human beings who are also realising human possibilities. She explains this connection as a kind of ‘attitude’, comparable to Marx and Feuerbach's notion of ‘species-being’, and John Rawl's idea that ‘citizenship in a just society fosters an attitude of vicarious participation of the citizens in each other's activities’, which enables them to regard ‘themselves as members of a community with a common culture in which each do their part’ (sic). This, she explains is how she views membership of the Kantian ‘Kingdom of ends’: it is to regard oneself as part of a ‘common humanity’.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, in this passage she is choosing to describe a human life as part of a larger human story, and humanity as ‘our collective, public story’.

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<sup>157</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 212.

<sup>158</sup> Korsgaard, *Self Constitution*, 212, footnote 6.

Both these additions – the notion that we are connected under common purposes and that human life can be understood as a story – carry rhetorical weight. This, I suggest, is because they invoke ideas with long histories in ethical discourse. People have a seemingly insatiable interest in hearing and telling stories that can be traced back to prehistory and which is now expressed through our many contemporary forms of electronic media. This interest is explored in theories of ‘narrative identity’ and ‘narrative ethics’, which could be linked to Korsgaard’s idea of a need to build a practical identity (in the following chapter I discuss how). However, it is not clear how these ideas relate to the ‘argument from humanity’. The strength that we draw from particular meanings, the interest with have in particular stories, presupposes existing value commitments. Thus, we cannot say what sort of story we are part of without saying something about what we value. The other addition: the idea that an individual’s worth has to do with being connected with something larger and greater is similarly ancient and persistent; Cassell, it may be remembered, mentioned it in connection to the sufferer’s ability to transcend his suffering.<sup>159</sup> It is therefore plausible to think that this kind of connectedness might be relevant to our understanding of ‘moral’ value, but it is again difficult to see how this addition is related to Korsgaard’s conception of humanity. Does ‘the argument from humanity’ establish a common value (or purpose) between all people? The answer is in one sense ‘yes’, but in another more substantial sense ‘no’.

The argument successfully demonstrates a normative link between individuals, in so far as they exchange reasons, for in exchanging reasons they show a shared concern with rationalising their actions and their self-understanding, and at least some minimal shared recognition of those reasons being exchanged. Particular reasons bind an individual together, and also bind societies together, because a reason is a rule for bringing together particulars (and an individual who or society which endorses a rule but then acts against it is necessarily fragmented by that act). However, the exchange of reasons, and the unifying effect of reasoning, presupposes that there are reasons; it presupposes that there is something that is valued. In this way, the value of a human life remains a question of ‘what we do with our lives ... and on what we do with our world ... value only exists if life is worth living, and that depends on what we do’.<sup>160</sup> In this respect the argument from humanity does not establish a common value for all humanity, and does not speak to the question of how a person’s life might be unified.

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<sup>159</sup> Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 45.

<sup>160</sup> See quotation above on page 79 (note 48). From Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 163.

In conclusion, I think that the most we can say about Korsgaard's 'argument from humanity' is that it establishes a circular connection between an individual values and ethical processes. If I value myself then I must value others who I judge to be like me in the relevant ways (a group that may be called 'humanity'). If I value others who are like me in the relevant ways then I should also value myself. But this does not answer the question of why I matter, or why other people matter. That people matter, or at least that something matters, is presumed as the bedrock of neo-Kantian moral philosophy. So we have come to the fundamental tension of Kantian philosophy: a person should be valued, but being a person does not give a person's life meaning. A person cannot be regarded simply as a means to an end, but nor can she make herself her own end. Being human is not itself a rationally constructed value, thus, *ex hypothesi*, it is not a value at all.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the notion of a moral identity cannot answer the question of how a person can remain whole. It seems that to answer this we must either focus on the particular values that comprise our 'local and contingent identities', or look elsewhere for another account of value.

### 3.8 Morality without 'moral value'

The implication of the above analysis of Korsgaard's 'argument from humanity' is that it means that there is no distinctly moral value, or moral law, that can be specified *a priori*. The 'moral identity', on the basis of reason alone, is empty. Morality is universal, but moral value is not. Reasons are normative; it is necessary to have reasons, but the reasons that a person has arise from her understanding of the value of her life (her practical identity). However, this does not mean that morality is relative or contingent, as Korsgaard suggests. We take reasons seriously when they convey that there is something of value at stake. If there are values that are pivotal to a person's practical identity, then she will regard those values as necessary. She will also regard them as universal in so far as she believes them to be necessary to the value of human life generally, and hence she will expect others to recognise the normative force of these reasons (and feel that there is something *wrong* if they do not).

What we typically call morality, or ethics, is simply an 'exchange of reasons' in relation to a topic of shared concern. All such discourse presupposes some shared reasons, for

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<sup>161</sup> This is a paraphrase of Victor Frankl, who wrote that 'being human cannot be its own meaning.' Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 83. Frankl goes on to write: 'It has been said that man must never be taken as a means to an end. Is this to imply that he is an end in itself, that he is intended and destined to realize and actualize himself? Man, I should say, realizes and actualizes values. He finds himself only to the extent to which he loses himself in the first place, be it for the sake of something or somebody, for the sake of a cause or a fellow man, or 'for God's sake'. Man's struggle for his self and his identity is doomed to failure unless it is enacted as dedication and devotion to something beyond his self, to something above his self.'

otherwise there would not be a mutual recognition of a need for discussion. One may quite *reasonably* suppose that there are certain reasons that are recognised in all instances of moral discourse. It is difficult to think how a group that did not respect human life, and hence prohibit murder, could develop a coherent set of values around which to build their shared life (a minimal practical identity), and hence one would expect such groups (and such individuals) to disintegrate. There are perhaps a number of values that are like this, and – moreover – I think that we could agree on a catalogue of actions that are *categorically* evil and actions that are *categorically* good. Yet I suspect we would have difficulty extracting from this a set of laws that can be straightforwardly and absolutely applied to all human circumstances as clear universal imperatives. This is partly because it is not simply the ‘act’ per se that we are concerned about, but also the ‘spirit’ in which the act is done. The imperative to not murder, for example, is not always simple. War remains, regrettably, an apparently necessary aspect of human life, and war involves killing. Even if killing out of necessity is considered permissible, there are still very different attitudes that a person may bring to such an act (e.g. I would say it is better that the necessity be sincerely regretted). In short, there is no clear *a priori* distinction between murder and killing that could apply to all situations.

To reiterate, I think that Korsgaard has provided a convincing account of morality, and with it a credible account of personal integrity, but that these have only limited practical application. A moral sense is intrinsic to a practical identity. Moral necessity arises from the perceived necessity of certain reasons. This means that morality is a contested domain of competing practical identities. The elements of this understanding of morality are provided in Korsgaard’s private reasons argument, but it is not clear that she follows the insights through. In the following chapter I will look more closely at the nature of reasons, in an effort to describe the constraints on our use of reasons, and the sorts of values that can be made coherent. This analysis of reasons shows the relationship between self and others to be the primary constituent of value, and in this way moves us toward a better understanding of the sorts of reasons that enable her to become more integrated.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed Korsgaard’s idea that a person is integrated through adherence to the principles that constitute her ‘practical identity’, i.e. the description under which she values her life and her actions. From this view, wholeness may be understood as a state whereby one is able to reflect ‘successfully’ on one’s actions. It is, in other words, a state of

agreement between one's practical identity and the reason that one is acting on. If a person has no reasons for acting, or cannot endorse the reasons that are presented to her, then she will not be whole, i.e. she will be suffering. It follows that a person may be able to cope better with illness and dying if she has anticipated these eventualities and accounted for them in her practical identity. Wittgenstein it seems is a person who did this whereas Ilych is not. The problem is that this does not tell us how one should do this. Korsgaard's conception of moral value does not provide an answer to this question. In the next chapter I discuss how the establishment of reasons requires a certain connection to the world and others, and how this fits with certain existing ideas about the values that unify a human life. This completes my discussion of the Kantian approach to personal unity. To move forward I propose that the insights it has provided be carried into a re-conceptualisation of the ontological framework. This is undertaken in chapter five where I introduce Spinoza's ontology and the conception of unity that emerges from it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AN INTER-SUBJECTIVE APPROACH TO VALUE

Wholeness, according to Korsgaard's theory, is achieved through acting on principles that cohere with one's 'practical identity'. A practical identity is a self-conception under which one 'values one's life' and regards one's action to be 'worth undertaking'. This self-conception governs our decision making by generating reasons (i.e. as we think about what to do we think about our established values), and is also reviewed in the light of subsequent events, or changes in our body or environment. A practical identity is more or less sustainable according to how well the reasons it generates can be maintained over the course of one's life. If a practical identity cannot incorporate certain situations or bodily changes it will fail to produce reasons when those situations or changes occur. In this predicament a person is unable to act; she cannot 'make sense' of her life, and cannot be whole. Thus, a practical identity can be more or less conducive to wholeness depending on how well the reasons it generates remain 'reasonable' throughout the various changes we are subject to. This brings us to the following question: what kind of identity produces such reasons? Or alternatively: which values continue to be valuable? I have argued that Korsgaard's transcendental argument – her 'argument from humanity' – does not address this question. It does not show how a person should conceive herself, which reasons she should act upon, or how she should value her life. On this reading of Korsgaard's theory, unity (and also morality) can only be established on an existing practical identity: an existing sense that one's life is 'worth living'.

Korsgaard's argument from humanity was introduced to address concerns about the variability of individual evaluations. If obligation is referred only to individual and evidently 'contingent' practical identities, then it seems that there can be no 'moral' obligations, because moral obligations must – according to Korsgaard – be universal and necessary. In my view, these concerns about the apparent changeability of obligation can be addressed through Korsgaard's private reasons argument. This argument was introduced ostensibly to counter a certain objection to the argument from humanity. It was intended to show that in valuing my own 'humanity' I must also value humanity in others; a conclusion that now appears redundant given my claim that Korsgaard's conception of humanity (the 'moral identity') is empty. However, the private reasons argument also shows that my individual

practical identity generates obligations to others because whatever reason I apply to myself I must also apply to others who fall under the relevant criteria. Moreover it shows that others may challenge my individual identity through the reasons that we share. This, I will argue, provides the basis of an alternative way of thinking about moral reasons and moral value. Rather than attempting to show *a priori* which reasons are moral (i.e. necessary and universal) I will instead show why reasons of this kind are reasonably inferred on the basis of our shared life. The precise nature of these reasons and what they exactly entail is left to be decided through the processes of ethical reasoning in given situations. This is what I discuss in the first part of this chapter.

If the approach to moral value that I outline is correct, then it follows that we are able to identify and challenge the values that unify a person's life through rational discourse. Values, on this view, are learned through training, and then through exchanging reasons with others. They are social artefacts, shared and contested between subjects who share a language in a common form of life. Hence I am describing this as an *inter-subjective* approach to value. In the second half of the chapter I introduce some of the concepts that are already current in discussions about wholeness, and indicate how they may be integrated with Korsgaard's theory.

The difficulty with the inter-subjective approach is that it relies on a measure of existing agreement between subjects, and only progresses as far as their collective wisdom. It effectively reduces to the exchange of examples, i.e. to the discussion of reasons that are already more or less intelligible. While this is useful (and important) when we are looking to implement or uphold established values (as is the case in many areas of healthcare), it is of little use in situations of general ignorance, where we are unsure of the values involved. This appears to be what we are facing with the issue of wholeness, as descriptions of clinical encounters or individual experiences are not taking the discussion forward. What is needed in such situations is a progression of thought that takes us beyond what is shared or familiar. This, I believe, is the role of the philosopher, and so in this thesis I have undertaken to examine the underlying structures of thought as they may apply to personal wholeness. Having followed the Kantian system through to this inter-subjective impasse, I propose in the next chapter an overthrow of that system and set out Spinoza's as an available alternative which can both incorporate the insights that have been gathered and take us significantly further.

## 4.1 Humanity as identified through shared reasons

Korsgaard's position is that a person is whole in so far as she can endorse reasons as the basis of her actions. To reflectively endorse the rational basis of one's action is to be 'at one' with oneself, i.e. whole. The more that a person is able to do this, the more integrated she is. In this section I am going to discuss how our use of reasons is constrained by our relation to the world in which those reasons 'make sense'; a world that we share with others. This, I will argue, provides sufficient grounding for the universal and necessary character of morality, and in turn provides a way of thinking about the values that unify an individual life.

Korsgaard formulated the argument from humanity, and the corresponding 'moral identity', because she was concerned there was 'a deep element of relativism in her system'. This concern arises from her notion that a person's practical identity is in large part 'contingent', both because it arises from genetic and social variations, and because the person may 'change her mind'. Moral obligations, she maintains, cannot be grounded on such contingencies. The view that I will argue for here is that the private reasons argument shows that individual identities are not contingent in these ways. A person cannot simply 'choose' which reasons she will be obligated by. Reasons exert a normative pressure simply in the moment that their meaning is understood, and a person cannot ignore this pressure simply by electing to be obligated by different reasons; not at least without some *rationalisation*, and this rationalisation is necessarily constrained by the limits of sense that are intrinsic to the language. These limits are set by the relationship between the language and the world. In other words, a person cannot simply choose an identity according to arbitrary preference; she can only choose an identity that 'makes sense'.

In the first part of the section I explain the basic connection that I have just drawn between reasons and meanings. This extends our understanding of 'reasons' beyond the narrow framework of reflective endorsement that Korsgaard established. In the following parts I discuss how meaning is constrained by reality, how reality is disclosed through the exchange of reasons, and how this leads to a notion of reasonability that can be applied to our understanding of value.

### 4.1.1 Reasons as meanings

In Korsgaard's system a potential reason becomes a reason when it passes the 'reflective test'. A potential reason is an incentive – impulse, desire, proposition etc – that I become

consciously aware of. The potential reason becomes my reason if I endorse it as the basis of an action that I am willing to undertake. There is truth in this model. The capacity to reflect enables me to choose whether or not to do something, and if my choice is to not endorse the reason then I do not *willingly* act. In that respect I cannot be said to ‘have’ a reason until it is reflectively endorsed. However, this is not the way reasons typically operate. Ordinarily the exchange of reasons passes without this kind of reflective testing. To see how this is, we must look more broadly at what constitutes a reason, and how reasons affect us.

A reason can be any kind of word or sign that suggests, prompts, provokes or justifies a particular thought or action. One cannot discern the nature of a reason by looking at the specific meaning involved outside of its context. To illustrate, imagine someone in bed on a work day being informed of the time. For this person the time is not merely information; it is also a reason: a reason to get out of bed. If someone were to ask her why she subsequently got out of bed she might reply ‘it’s seven thirty’. Similarly, if a person has laundry drying on the clothesline and notices that it has started to rain, then this awareness might constitute a reason: a reason to gather the laundry from the clothesline and bring it inside. If required to give a reason for this activity, the person might say ‘it’s raining’. Korsgaard herself points out that we can *give* a person a reason to turn and look simply by calling out her name.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, calling a name could signal a variety of ‘reasons’ depending on the context (compare one person calling her friend’s name across a street, to a crowd chanting a player’s name at a sports game). To see what a word or sign means one must look at the use that it has in its particular context.<sup>163</sup> The same applies to reasons.

It may be argued that in each of these examples I have mentioned the reasons only count as reasons because they have prior endorsement within a system of related actions and meanings. The person could ‘think again’, if she chose to, and retract the prior endorsement. The response to this is the same that was given in the previous chapter in relation to the chauvinist. Firstly, to act *deliberately* one needs some kind of rationalisation, and thus one can only ‘think again’ by using additional meanings (or reasons). Secondly, one’s decisions determine one’s relationship to reality, and hence the meanings (and values) that are subsequently available. A person may think, ‘it’s time to go, but I cannot be bothered, and so I’ll just be late for work’. She is free to think this, but the consequence will be that her work is not done (further consequences may follow depending on her work arrangements). Similarly, she can choose to ignore the imperative to collect the laundry, but the consequence

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<sup>162</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, section 4.2.7.

<sup>163</sup> As was indicated in chapter one, this is a central theme of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, section 43.

will be that it gets wet. Likewise, you can choose to ignore someone when she calls your name, but not without risk of offending her. All these consequences change the way that a person can think about her identity.

To this one may reply that a change in identity (e.g. becoming unemployed) only matters if person *cares* about that aspect of her identity. Do I care whether my work is done, my laundry is dry, whether you are offended, and so on? This, I suspect, is the bedrock of Korsgaard's concern about relativism (note her remark: 'you might stop caring whether you live up to the demands of a particular role').<sup>164</sup> The problem with this, as she later acknowledges, is that a person cannot simply 'stop caring' without personal cost, and ultimately personal destruction. I may not care whether or not the laundry is dry on a given day, but I cannot stop caring, for example, whether my children are fed. To fail in my role as a father would be irrevocably serious. There are numerous other examples with the same level of 'normative gravity'. In such cases, the meanings involved (e.g. my identity as a father) have priority over 'preferences' in a given situation, and so in these cases I cannot simply 'choose' to think about my identity differently. This is the sense of necessity that is carried in our moral obligations.

If the above argument is correct, then to understand moral obligation we need to consider what kinds of 'meanings' – what aspects of our identities – exert the sense of necessity that I have described. As I said, I do not think it is possible to answer this question *a priori*, that is, without considering the particulars of a given situation and the values that may be relevant. We can however develop an understanding of how such 'necessary' constraints are formed, by considering the relationship between meaning and reality. I describe this relationship in the next part of this section.

#### **4.1.2 Meaning and reality**

Though Kant is not known as a philosopher of language, he does outline an account of meaning in his analysis of concepts and their role in cognition, and there is enough in this to convey the constraints that I have mentioned. This analysis was briefly mentioned in chapter two when I described the activities of the mind in synthesising the manifold of intuition in the construction of experience. In order to properly understand this account of meaning it will be useful to once again have in mind what Kant was responding to in the empiricists.

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<sup>164</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 120. I am not sure whether it is the capriciousness of desire or the variability within and between human societies that is the main source of contingency. Korsgaard does recognise that there cannot be a straightforward distinction between desires and reasons. I will not attempt to wholly explain her position here.

When Locke turned his attention to the question of how words become meaningful he described words as names that we give to the ideas that are found in experience. ‘Words’, he said, ‘signify’ or ‘mark’ the ‘ideas in the mind of the speaker’.<sup>165</sup> This account suffers two obvious weaknesses, both of which are fatal to its status as an account of meaning. Firstly, it says nothing about how communication works between subjects. Interpersonal communication is predicated on the notion that what I mean by a word is more or less what you mean (misunderstanding happens, but in everyday communication the presumption is that this is the exception rather than the rule). Locke’s account of meaning cannot explain this agreement because neither of us have access to the ideas that our words are naming, and so we cannot know that we mean the same thing. This is part of the solipsistic predicament inherited from Descartes, and Locke has no solution other than to note that:

‘common use, by a tacit consent, appropriates certain sounds to certain *ideas* in all languages, which so far limits the signification of that sound, that unless a man applied it to the same *idea*, he does not speak properly: and let me add that unless a man’s words excite the same *ideas* in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking he does not speak intelligibly’<sup>166</sup>

Ward describes these remarks as a ‘strange mixture of Cartesian orthodoxy and actual observation of how language works’, and points out that the notion of ‘tacit consent’ on such a grand scale is too fantastical to stand as a solution to the problem.<sup>167</sup>

The second obvious weakness in Locke’s view of meaning is its failure to account for general terms. The majority of the words that we use do not stand for one particular ‘idea’ (i.e. one particular object of experience) but for a range of objects that are somehow grouped together. For example, the word ‘cat’ does not in itself signify any particular cat; it is a term that could be used to refer to a large number of ‘cats’, between which there can be great variance (observe the differences between a leopard and the common moggy). To account for this fact Locke is forced to posit the notion of ‘an abstract general idea’, which is an idea that is somehow ‘separated from the circumstances of time and place’ and abstracted so as to stand for ‘a sort of thing’ rather than one in thing in particular.<sup>168</sup> These abstract general ideas are what Locke thinks give meaning to general terms. The problem, as Berkeley pointed out, is

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<sup>165</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III ii 1.

<sup>166</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III ii 8.

<sup>167</sup> Ward, *History of Philosophy I*, 87.

<sup>168</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III iii 6.

that such ideas are a fiction. There is no idea of a cat that is neither striped, dappled, monochrome, large, small, fat, thin, long haired, short haired, but all and none of these at once.<sup>169</sup> There must, therefore, be some other way of accounting for the meaning of general terms. Berkley's suggestion was that a general term gains meaning from a particular idea that is made to 'stand for all the particulars of the same sort'.<sup>170</sup> He cannot explain how this multiple representation is established, though he moves towards the position arrived at by Kant when he points out that signification can be limited through a definition, i.e. a rule for grouping a set of ideas together; in the case of the term 'cat' this would be something like 'a four legged mammal with whiskers, fangs, and a certain languid manner' (depending of course on who is using the concept: a zoologist might prefer a rather different definition).<sup>171</sup> He stops short of Kant in that he does not regard the definition as constituting the meaning of the word but rather as the particular idea standing in. In this respect he remains committed to the principles of classical empiricism.

In Kant's epistemology knowledge is not comprised of ideas as objects *given* in experience but ideas as concepts. He defines a concept as 'a rule according to which ... an intuition can always be exhibited'. The rule is the formula for grouping (uniting) together the particulars (e.g. those certain objects that are furry, meowing, animal ...), and the intuition is the raw material received through the senses. 'All cognition', he goes on to say, 'requires a concept, however imperfect or obscure it may be; but as far as its form is concerned the latter is always something general, and something that serves as a rule'.<sup>172</sup> Later, he characterises understanding itself as 'the faculty of rules'. 'Sensibility', he writes, 'gives us forms (of intuitions), but the understanding gives us rules. It is always busy poring through the appearances with the aim of finding some sort of rule in them.'<sup>173</sup>

*Meaning*, on Kant's view, exists simply in a person following a rule. To execute a meaningful utterance is to use the word or sign in accordance with the rule. Thus, it is in my apprehension of the utterance cat that I am conscious of the meaning, and I master the rule for applying that sign in a variety of conditions to various (different) presentations of cats (according to a regularity that may be complex but to which I am sensitive). There is no need for a further act whereby I attach the word 'cat' to the 'idea' in my mind, either as a

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<sup>169</sup> Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, intro, section 6. I have paraphrased Berkley here; his hypothetical example is an abstract general triangle that is 'neither oblique nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once'.

<sup>170</sup> Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, intro, sections 11 & 12.

<sup>171</sup> Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, intro, section 18. See also Ward, *History of Philosophy I*, 103.

<sup>172</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A106.

<sup>173</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 127.

perception *or as a rule*. I am aware of the meaning simply in the spontaneous act that is performed by the mind in deploying the concept.

If one adopts this account of meaning then in one sense it becomes very easy to explain how meanings become reasons. Meanings are developed to serve the varied purposes of those who use them; they can, as Wittgenstein notes, be informative, directive, reassuring, humorous, menacing, puzzling, or combinations of these and more besides.<sup>174</sup> Yet despite the variety of forms that meanings can take, they are all essentially rules, and rules are inherently normative. To follow a rule is to follow a certain pattern of thought or action, and hence to be conscious of a meaning is to be immediately conscious of a thought or action that needs to be undertaken. So, alongside our utterances is an expectation that those we speak to will react in certain ways. If we call to a person by name we will expect her to turn, and we will think that she *should* turn; if she does not we will wonder why, and we will most likely expect her to explain. Similarly, if we tell a joke that we *know* to be funny we will expect those listening to laugh at the punch line. We would think that they *ought* to laugh, and we might think that there is something *wrong* with them if they do not. Likewise, when my son hears me saying that it is ‘seven thirty’, he does not need to move from the awareness of a certain fact (*viz.* the time) to the awareness of a certain obligation. Rather he is immediately conscious of both the fact *and* the imperative to get up, because he is trained in the rules followed in our household. ‘Seven thirty’ is a reason to get up simply because that is ‘how things are done around here’, which is to say, that is one of the rules followed in this household.

From an empiricist’s point of view, the problem with Kant’s account of meaning is that it seems to separate our concepts from that which they are about. In other words, it seems to deny the connection between our ideas and reality. In abandoning the *straightforward* correspondence of an idea to an aspect of reality, Kant appears to have abandoned our grounds for distinguishing a true idea from a false one. If, after all, ideas are simply rules that we have for picking out certain features of appearance, then how can one say which rule is the right rule to follow? This is why Kant has historically been characterised as an idealist (the view that our knowledge is only knowledge of how things ‘appear’ to us), or an ‘anti-realist’ (the view that there is no knowledge of how things *really* are). These interpretations fail to take account of what is required in order for a rule to be formed, i.e. of what is entailed in a rule being ‘found in appearances’, as Kant put it. In order for a rule to be formed there must be a cognitive activity involving the detection and action of certain regularities which determines that the rule is being followed. There must, in other words, be a way of knowing

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<sup>174</sup> This is illustrated at the beginning of the philosophical investigations in the famous ‘builders’ example. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 11-3.

that the concepts involved are being used correctly or incorrectly. This means that there must be certain continuities (reference points) that the thinker can recognise and respond to in the act of thinking. Thus, whenever there is a rule that is *working* – i.e. a concept that is *making sense* – it must be the case that we are correctly discerning some aspect of reality. For example, I could not form the concept ‘cat’ without attending to the features that distinguish this animal from others, and these need to be relatively stable. If the characteristics of animals were wholly erratic we could not form concepts to distinguish them.

A dedicated sceptic might want to protest that we have no way of being certain that what appears to us as ‘sense’ corresponds with how things actually are. Perhaps, it would be argued, it only seems that we are thinking consistently, when in fact it is the evil demon that is implanting the appearance of consistency where none exists. This argument suffers a number of problems, the first of which is that it supposes a concept of certainty that is completely *unworkable*. Certainty is not, as Descartes supposed, established through the correlation of an idea with some unknown reality, but on the basis of established rules. Doubt arises when we are not sure how a concept should be used, which means we can only doubt in so far as we have a concept to apply, i.e. a rule to follow. The notion of radical doubt is therefore incoherent, for all doubt presupposes some degree of knowledge. There is nothing that could make me doubt that my cat is a cat.<sup>175</sup> This is not because I have somehow discerned the true essence of ‘catness’; it is rather that I am sure that my use of the term ‘cat’ is in keeping with the rule governing that concept. It remains possible that I may encounter objects that I am not sure about, i.e. which I am in doubt as to whether to describe as a cat. There are cases which the existing rule does not cover, and situations where there is not enough information to make a judgment. For example, looking from a distance I may be in doubt as to whether the animal I see is a large cat or a small dog, and I will not be able to resolve the doubt until it is closer, i.e. until I have more information. However, in both kinds of doubt, whether it be through the under determination of our concepts or through lack of information, the doubt presupposes something as certain, i.e. an established concept.

If the preceding arguments are correct, then Kant’s account of meaning shows that both idealism and radical scepticism are untenable. The presence of meaning entails a connection with an ordered ‘reality’ that is good enough to sustain repeated judgments and warrant the use of a general term with consistency by different observers.<sup>176</sup> The implication is that in order to use words a person must be attentive and receptive to the features of reality

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<sup>175</sup> I could become delusional, but that would mean, by definition, ‘losing touch with reality’, and this is always indicated by the inability to think and act in a way that harmonises with the world, i.e. by a failure to make sense.

<sup>176</sup> In using this term we must be careful not to fall back into a notion of *unrealisable* ‘Cartesian’ reality, which, I have argued, undermines the very basis of factual distinction.

that ground the rules constituting the sense of those words. Every person who uses meanings (and hence every person who uses reasons) must orientate his use of those meanings to reality in the ways established in the rules. A square is not a circle; a cat is not a dog, kindness is not cruelty, and so on and so forth. These constraints apply to all people who use reasons, irrespective of the choices that they ‘happen’ to make. So, when deliberating about how one should live, there are necessary and – in a certain sense – universal constraints.

### 4.1.3 Rules and inter-subjectivity

The difficulty is that ‘reality’ is rarely simple. Unlike the case of squares and circles (geometric cases), most of our concepts, especially our ethical concepts, are not and perhaps cannot be precisely (clearly and distinctly) determined. This is why so much of our thinking, and especially our ethical thinking, involves uncertainty. Indeed, Kant argued that it was only a very limited number of propositions that could be held with absolute certainty, *viz.* those that were derived from transcendental analysis (which he argued encompassed mathematics and geometry). However, there is another measure of certainty that is discernible in Kant’s philosophy and central to Wittgenstein’s. This is the certainty that arises as our reasoning agrees with the reasoning of others. It is this kind of ‘certainty’ that is most relevant to our ethical reasoning.

In communicating with others we are sensitive to whether or not we are following the same rules. For the first part of our lives, and for a good part of the rest of them, we are reliant on others to teach us the words that we have, and also to help us to develop new ones. Sharing concepts with others enables us to verify our judgments by checking them against the judgments of other people. For example, suppose that I am worried that the way the colour green appears to me is unlike the way it appears to other people. For a Cartesian or a classical empiricist this seems an insurmountable problem because both start by equating knowledge directly with sensory experience.<sup>177</sup> If my knowledge of green solely consisted in my sensory information I would have no way of knowing that my knowledge is the same as yours, because I cannot enter your consciousness and compare the way green appears to you with the way green appears to me. However, because our concepts are rules, we can know that our experiences are the same simply from the fact that we can understand each other’s speech. We can talk about colours, and discuss green as a concept. Such discussion can only be intelligible in so far as our concepts mean the same thing, *i.e.* as we are using them in

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<sup>177</sup> Though Descartes departs from this premise and turns instead to rationalism.

accordance with the same rules. In other words, the possibility of a correspondence in rules depends on a correspondence in the sensory information we are discussing. If what I experience as green was what you experience as red, and vice versa, then we could not discuss these colours intelligibly. Traffic lights would not work as a way of directing traffic. Colour charts would be impossible to construct (there could not be a straight inversion because there are multiple relationships at stake, not simply two: think of the way colour graduates from yellow to orange and then to red). Traffic lights *are* an effective way of directing traffic. Those who can see colours all agree that the spectrum of colours on colour charts is arranged as it ‘should’ be.<sup>178</sup> Thus, we can be sure that we judge correctly when we say that we have (more or less) the same experience of colour. QED.

This inter-subjective conception of truth is outlined by Kant in the following passage located near the end of the Critique of Pure Reason:

‘The touchstone of whether taking something to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true; for in that case there is at least a presumption that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on the common ground, namely the object, with which they therefore all agree and through which the truth of the judgment is proved’.<sup>179</sup>

So, to the general intelligibility constraint inherent in the use of concepts we can add the fact that a person in using concepts is in relationship with others, who are interacting with the same objects that he is interacting with. We can discern the truth of our ideas through the way that they cohere with the ideas of others. This has significant implications for our practical reasoning. It means that other people can – in so far as they use the same reasons that we use, challenge – question and support the decisions that we make. Even where others are not familiar with the reasons that we are using, there is a general expectation that we should be able to explain our decisions in ways that make them intelligible to others (whether or not this actually happens depends on a justification being justifiably required). There can be disagreement about many of our values, because many of our values are complex. People can disagree about what is ‘kind’ in a given situation, and hence the phrase ‘sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind’. Yet there cannot be absolute disagreement about value, because if

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<sup>178</sup> One might think of colour vision deficiency as an obvious objection here, but the fact that we can identify and discuss these deficiencies only proves the point. Even those who are colour deficient agree about the relationships between the colours that they can see, as they would in ordering shades of grey from dark to light.

<sup>179</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, B 848 & 849.

there was we would not understand each other, and hence not communicate. Actual cruelty is never kind (to prove this one only needs to think of a clear cut case of cruelty).<sup>180</sup>

It is curious that Korsgaard does not refer to Kant's analysis of concepts in her private reasons argument, but instead to Wittgenstein's private language argument. These aspects of Kant's philosophy are perhaps obscured because the first Critique is framed as a transcendental analysis of the conditions of experience, and if we follow his inquiry (as Kant began it) with empiricist assumptions then we are predisposed to think of experience as belonging to an individual. Thus when we read Kant's remarks about rules being 'found in appearances' we are liable to imagine this 'finding' as the solitary work of one person's understanding. Concepts can be developed by individuals, but this is unusual, and irrespective of its derivation the concept as a rule (i.e. something general) must always capture a form found in reality, and be communicable to others so long as they have access to that aspect of reality.

#### 4.1.4 Practical identity and reasonability

The purpose of this lengthy digression regarding the relationship between meaning and reality has been to show how a person is constrained in the ways that she 'thinks about' her identity by the forms of reality that give her reasons their 'sense'. This means that there are certain things that a person cannot coherently think about herself and hence certain obligations that necessarily follow from a standpoint of value (I have noted, for example, that there are certain actions that could never be described as 'kind'). A *universal* obligation refers to any value that is necessary to a person having a practical identity, i.e. valuing her life. As I have noted, it is difficult to specify what these obligations precisely are *a priori*, i.e. without considering the particulars of a person's practical identity and the situations she is facing. Nevertheless, there are some actions that must always be at least *problematic* given what we know about human life. In the previous chapter I mentioned killing another person as an example; the practice of slavery is probably another. Cora Diamond conveys the inescapably problematic nature of these practices in the following well-known passage:

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<sup>180</sup> Peter Winch discusses this approach to value in 'Eine Einstellung zur Seele' and 'Who is my Neighbour?', which are both found in his collection *Trying to Make Sense*. In drawing these conclusions I am not wishing to discount the difficulty of cross-cultural ethics. Cross-cultural ethics can be very difficult. Examples of what I regard as 'clear-cut' wrong doing are offered in the next section (e.g. slavery), though I recognise that others may see the examples differently, and so would require further discussion to agree with me. This however would not disrupt my central claim, which is that if we are having this discussion (if you simply acknowledge the *sense* of my ethical claim) then we must at some level be talking about the same thing, and hence be – in principle – capable of some kind of agreement. How much agreement is actually achieved is another matter.

Now suppose I am a practical-minded, hardheaded slaveholder whose neighbour has, on his deathbed, freed his slaves. I might regard such a man as foolish, but not as batty, not batty in the way I should think of someone if he had, let us say, freed his cows on his deathbed. Compare the case Orwell describes, from his experience in the Spanish Civil War, of being unable to shoot at a half-dressed man who was running along the top of the trench parapet, holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. 'I had come here to shoot at 'Fascists', but a man who is holding up his trousers is not a 'Fascist', he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you do not feel like shooting at him.' The notion of enemy ('Fascist') and fellow creature are there in a kind of tension, and even a man who could shoot at a man running holding his trousers up might recognise perfectly well why Orwell could not.<sup>181</sup>

In the first example the slaveholder tacitly admits that it makes sense to free one's slaves, in a way that it does not make sense to free one's cows. This shows that his position on slavery is open to be challenged. If he was to reflect properly he would recognise this and his conscience would be troubled. If he reflected for long enough, the integrity of his identity would begin to unravel. In one sense then he has a strong incentive not to reflect, and given that is the case he is likely to stifle his own reasoning, and hence his ability to act autonomously and integrate his identity. Either way then, he is in moral peril. Moreover, if he does not reflect on his own, others can help him through moral outcry. Because he understands the words involved, he cannot escape the normative force of such ethical challenges.<sup>182</sup>

Orwell, in the other example, displays the kind of reflective awareness the 'hardheaded' slaveholder is evidently resisting. He sets out to kill another man, on the grounds that the other man is a 'fascist'. Yet when he sees the fascist running along the parapet holding up his trousers he finds that he can no longer reasonably think of him as a fascist, and so no longer feels able to shoot him. In other words, he cannot reflectively endorse that action, and hence his identity as a soldier fighting the fascists. To re-integrate his identity he must resolve the tension Diamond describes, by either accepting that killing fascists also means killing men, or by abandoning his identity as a soldier.

In my view, the operation of reason in response to the aspects of reality described in these sorts of examples adequately accounts for what we call moral discourse. The argument

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<sup>181</sup> Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 332.

<sup>182</sup> Suppose, by contrast, that this man could not comprehend the difference described. He or she would be impervious to ethical challenge, but he would seem to us either insane, i.e. incapable of reasoning, or somehow 'other', similar to the way that his cows are other.

from humanity does not constitute a distinct ‘moral identity’, but rather a universal need to answer to the claims of reason. Value is something that is expressed through and mediated by the use of meanings, which are necessarily responsive to the features of reality that give them sense. What then does this tell us about how a person maintains wholeness?

The intersubjectivity of meaning shows that we have a common form of life (without this our words could not make sense), and with that a shared interest in the value of certain things within that form of life. In moral discussion we tend to focus on what is impermissible, i.e. on the kinds of reasons that are incoherent, and hence on imperatives such as ‘thou shall not kill’. However, we have the same shared interest in the reasons that give value to a human life. To devalue another (‘a fellow creature’) is to devalue oneself, and to ascribe value to another is to ascribe value to oneself. If there is another – such as Ilych – who cannot value his life while he is dying, then we have an interest in helping him to see himself as valuable. In so far as we can do this, we elevate our own value (more precisely, our value in the situation he is in). This is precisely what Gerasim, the butler’s assistant and the only man in Ilych’s story who could bring him any comfort, said in explanation of why he cared for him.<sup>183</sup> In sharing meanings we can also learn from others how to value ourselves. Ilych could have considered the way Gerasim valued him and learned from this how to value himself. As it was, he only got as far as the realisation that his life had been ‘wrong’; yet nevertheless it seems significant that he came to this realisation as he was looking at Gerasim.<sup>184</sup> Perhaps in contemplating Gerasim’s ‘good nature’ he became aware of how different his life might have been. Sadly his realisation came too late, and he dies before he is able to rebuild his self-conception and resolve his suffering. His last words are to his wife: ‘take him away...sorry for him [i.e. his son]...sorry for you too ...’ and then ‘forego’; the end of an incomplete attempt to ask for forgiveness, an act which Tolstoy implies would have brought a measure of truth or ‘rightness’ to his life.<sup>185</sup>

The problem with the inter-subjective approach to value, which I noted at the beginning of this discussion, is that we are left dependent on the examples that are available, and our ability to agree in the interpretation. Many examples are open to multiple interpretations, and do not always provide a coherent or unitary perspective. Tolstoy does not

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<sup>183</sup> ‘Gerasim alone did not lie; everything showed that he alone understood the facts of the case and did not consider it necessary to disguise them, but simply felt sorry for his emaciated and enfeebled master. Once when Ivan Ilych was sending him away he even said straight out: “We shall all of us die, so why should I grudge a little trouble?” – expressing the fact that he did not think his work burdensome, because he was doing it for a dying man and hoped someone would do the same for him when ‘his time came.’ Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, 115.

<sup>184</sup> See the passage cited on page 2.

<sup>185</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, 133.

tell us what it was about Gerasim that made him different to Ilych, and it is often not the purpose of literature to do so. The story reveals questions but does not answer them. If – as seems to be the case – there is no answer forthcoming from our current understanding, then we must advance our understanding. This, as I have said, is the task of philosophy, and this is why I discuss Spinoza’s theory in the next two chapters. However, before I come to that, it is worth reviewing the interpretation of Korsgaard’s theory that has been developed in this chapter and the ways that it may be useful. In the next section I revisit the problematic examples of Fagin and Eichmann that I introduced in chapter two, and indicate how these might be understood following the inter-subjective account of value discussed here. I then introduce some of the key ideas that are being explored in contemporary discussions of wholeness. I consider the extent to which these ideas may be incorporated with Korsgaard’s theory, and how their incorporation may take our understanding forward. As we find them to be incompatible, and as we find that their incorporation fails to advance our understanding, we also find evidence of the need for further theoretical work.

#### **4.2 Incoherent principles and limited dignity**

The question I asked in chapter two was whether the apparently principled decisions of Fagin and Eichmann were dignifying. Fagin’s choice was to refuse to renounce his identity as a Jew so as to escape execution. Eichmann’s was to refuse to acknowledge the authority of his accusers and to walk upright to his execution after invoking Nazi ideology. Following Korsgaard, we could say that these men are acting in accordance with their practical identities, and – moreover – attempting to maintain the unity of their respective identities, even though it is costing them certain undesirable experiences (in Fagin’s case it is costing him an extension of life). Following the above discussion of how meanings need to be grounded in a sense of reality, we may describe these actions as only dignified in a limited degree because the principles only make limited sense in the situations they are in. Fagin’s actions carry more dignity than Eichmann’s, because his principles make more sense, but only partially. To see the lack of sense in their actions we should first consider why these men are choosing to act on these particular principles.

Why would a character like Fagin regard his identity as a Jew as more important than life itself? One might say that his Jewish faith was the only ‘genuinely’ good thing that he had known, and that it was his only possible path of salvation, but that answer begs the question, because it does not explain why it is the only ‘genuine’ good, and it also does not fit

with the lifestyle he chose; a lifestyle patently at odds with Jewish values. Another possible explanation is that he used his identity as a Jew as a way of justifying to himself his life of deception and crime, in that it enabled him to think of himself as different: a mistreated outcast struggling against a hostile and oppressive society. Crimes against those who are both ‘other’ and hostile might not be considered ‘crimes’ in the same way. If he were to forsake this identity now he would no longer have this justification, and thus he would no longer be able to ‘endorse’ the life that he had lived. He would become thoroughly alienated from himself, and the self-conception that he had – the ‘person’ he was – would unravel. Better to die.

Eichmann’s actions are open to a similar interpretation. By invoking the ‘principles’ or ‘values’ that he lived by as a Nazi he is able to hold on to the thought that he has some defence for his actions (e.g. he was acting as an employee of what he regarded as a legitimate and perhaps even admirable authority), and – more importantly perhaps – it allows him to maintain the idea that he and the other Nazi’s are set apart from the rest of humanity (because they stand for higher ideals). If he can hold on to that idea then he need not be disturbed by the fact that the majority of the world regarded his principles as abhorrent. In this way he can maintain the integrity of his self-conception, and thereby preserve himself, even though he is about to die.

The incoherence of Eichmann’s position is evident in the discrepancy between his actions and his self-understanding. He claimed to be no different to any other member of ‘modern’, ‘civilised’ European society, which meant – among other things – that he bore no racial hatred towards Jewish people, and yet at the same time he administered their mass execution. This incongruence between his actions and expressed values necessarily affects his ability to reflect rationally, and so achieve wholeness. As Arendt wrote in her own quasi-sentencing of Eichmann:

‘You admitted that the crime committed against the Jewish people during the war was the greatest crime in recorded history, and you admitted your role in it. But you said you had never acted from base motives, that you had never hated Jews, and still that you could not have acted otherwise and that you did not feel guilty. We find this difficult, though not altogether impossible, to believe; there is some, though not very much, evidence against you in this matter of motivations and conscience that could be proved beyond reasonable doubt...’<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 277-9. This is an extract of what Arendt believes one of the judges at his trial should have said (to reflect true justice) to Eichmann in sentencing him. The whole statement is worth

Though he apparently does not recognise this contradiction, it nevertheless limits his ability to reflect rationally on his own value as a human being, and this is indicated in his failure to appreciate the requirements of justice during his trial, and his estrangement from the meaning of his own death.<sup>187</sup> These are indications of a broken identity: a conception of a human life that cannot coherently be regarded as worth living.

According to the interpretation I have offered here, both Fagin and Eichmann in their ‘principled actions’ are holding on to the small shreds of value that are available to them, having lived as they did and being in the circumstances they are in. There is a measure of dignity in their actions because they are genuine actions, i.e. expressions of the unity that constitutes their identities. However, there are also good reasons for concluding the opposite, i.e. that these are not dignified lives or dignified deaths (recall that Gaita said he could not understand Arendt saying that Eichmann died with dignity). The identities that they are trying to hold together are badly tenuous, in that they do not provide either clear conviction or reasons that will carry through the events of their lives. In other words, the values that they are holding on to are specious: they do not afford an enduring sense of the worth of life. Fagin as portrayed in the original novel spends his last days in prison wrecked by fear and self pity. Eichmann, as Gaita points out, seems to be hardly aware of what he is saying while he decries his sentence and declares himself unafraid of death, as these bold proclamations are patently self-contradicting.<sup>188</sup> For the same reasons we can say that these men are not whole. They are not able to consistently endorse the reasons they have acted upon; their lives do not reflect a coherent unity.

### 4.3 The need for meaning

Korsgaard’s idea that we need coherent reasons to act and live is comparable to the more familiar notion that we need ‘meaning’ to live well, a notion that is commonly expressed in the proverbial (and some say misconceived) search for the ‘meaning of life’.<sup>189</sup> The idea that meaning is constitutive of health has been highlighted by a number of writers, the most well

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reading, and the closing sentences particularly striking: ‘you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world – we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang’.

<sup>187</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 302-3.

<sup>188</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 302.

<sup>189</sup> I do not discuss here why it is thought misconceived. The complaint is usually that an answer cannot be given to the question as it is generally put. In chapter six I offer an explanation of why this is the case.

known being the psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, who declared the ‘will to meaning’ to be the ‘fundamental human drive’.<sup>190</sup> Frankl’s work emphasises the importance of individual agency, and is largely focused on the question of how life retains meaning in the midst of suffering. For these two reasons it has received much attention in various quarters of medical literature, notably in those concerned with spirituality, chronic illness, and the end of life.<sup>191</sup> Much of Frankl’s clinical work both before and after the war (and even during his time in the camps) was on treating patients at risk of suicide. His central claim that a person can give value to her life by choosing to act on particular meanings is closely related to the original Kantian claim that human dignity is tied to capacity to choose to act on ‘moral principles’,<sup>192</sup> and closer still to Korsgaard’s view that human value comes from acting on personal principles. It is closer to Korsgaard in the sense that Frankl locates meaning in the patient’s personal framework of value rather than in Kant’s metaphysical notion of pure practical reason.<sup>193</sup> Thus, in therapy he would typically try to direct his patient to meanings that are contained in the values that she holds. The following is an example that he used to illustrate his approach:

‘An old doctor consulted me in Vienna because he could not get rid of a severe depression caused by the death of his wife. I asked him, ‘What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?’ Whereupon he said: ‘For her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!’ I then added, ‘You see Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it is you who have spared her this suffering; but now you have to pay for it by surviving and mourning her.’ The old man suddenly saw his plight in a

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<sup>190</sup> Frankl directly contrasts this view with those of his more well known predecessors, Freud and Adler: ‘Psychoanalysis speaks of the *pleasure principle*, individual psychology of *status drive*. The pleasure principle might be termed the *will-to-pleasure*; the status drive is equivalent to the *will-to-power*. But where do we hear of that which most deeply inspires man; where is the innate desire to give as much meaning as possible to one’s life, to actualise as many values as possible – what I should like to call the *will-to-meaning*?’ Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, xvi.

<sup>191</sup> It is significant that Cassell’s definition of suffering as a threat to a person’s integrity is often interpreted as a threat to the person’s sense of meaning. This analytic connection is supported by a study of terminally ill patients by Mount, Boston and Cohen, ‘Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being’. The study presents interviews from 21 patients, and distinguished some as experiencing ‘suffering/anguish’ and others as experiencing ‘integrity/wholeness’. One of the emergent themes of the interviews with the suffering patients was a sense of disconnection with ‘ultimate meaning’, or ‘crises of meaning’, while those experiencing wholeness spoke of having a sense of meaning. There are many similar examples like this in palliative care literature.

<sup>192</sup> Frankl greatly admires Kant; at one point he describes him ‘as the greatest philosopher of all time’. Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 83.

<sup>193</sup> Frankl discusses the relationship between medicine and personal meanings, especially religious meanings, in chapter four of *The Doctor and the Soul*.

new light, and re-evaluated his suffering in the meaningful terms of a sacrifice for the sake of his wife.<sup>194</sup>

In this example, the patient recognises that loving his wife entails his present time of grief, and so he is able to reinterpret his circumstances as a sacrifice, and this enables him to value this stage of his life and the suffering that it involves.

The notion of a meaningful sacrifice reflects a critical link that Frankl draws between meaning, value and responsibility. Value does not derive from meaning simply by being ‘present’; there must be an active response to the meaning on the part of the person. The doctor in this example must acknowledge the necessity of his suffering and accept his duty to live out his grief. He could resolve to reject this duty, but to do so would be to betray the source of his value (his love for his wife). Not accepting this duty would entail wishing his wife was grieving him, which is contrary to loving her. It might be suggested that he could wish them both dead at the same time, but this would entail one of them committing suicide (*a la* Romeo and Juliet), and this – Frankl would argue – would likewise be a betrayal of the value of life. The point is that the values carried in meanings can entail certain costs. To not accept such costs is to deny the value.

Frankl intimates the link between meaning and value throughout his writing,<sup>195</sup> but he does not offer any systematic distinction between them, nor does he propose a general theory of the nature or origin of value. He describes three kinds of values that may give meaning to a person’s life: *creative* values, i.e. the values attached to activity, *experiential* values, i.e. the experience of the ‘True, the Good, and the Beautiful’, and *attitudinal* values, which concern the stance we take in response to things that happen to us.<sup>196</sup> Beyond this quasi-taxonomy he relies (similarly to Kant and Korsgaard) on the notion that people have a basic sense of certain things as good and certain things as bad, and from there on his own extensive clinical and personal experience. He also supposes (again like Kant and Korsgaard) that people associate normative requirements with their values, and that they will therefore recognise a responsibility or duty to act in accordance with those values, and that this recognition implies the freedom to do so. Accordingly, his therapeutic technique did not usually involve introducing a value that a person was not aware of, but rather involved indicating values that are already present, and the imperative to act on them. ‘The meaning of life’, he claimed, is

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<sup>194</sup> Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, xx & *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 26.

<sup>195</sup> He describes meaningful decisions as decisions that achieve the ‘realisation of value’. See *The Doctor and the Soul*, xviii & xix

<sup>196</sup> Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, xix.

not something remote or abstract, or something that a person needs to find, but is rather found in the concrete reality of an individual situation. 'Life', he says, 'is a task'.<sup>197</sup> Life presents us with a series of 'questions' and our 'task' is to answer these questions. It is life then that we must 'answer for' and not the other way around.<sup>198</sup> So, while Frankl does not offer a theory of value, he is committed to a notion of responsibility. On this basis I would say that his view of value is most like the existentialists' (or at least that of Jaspers; perhaps not Sartre), and indeed his work is often described as 'existential psychology'.

Another feature that distinguishes Frankl's view of value is his opposition to the forms of reductionism characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and psychology. This opposition is demonstrated in his response to a comment that he once received from an American psychoanalyst in relation to the above example.<sup>199</sup> Having heard Frankl recount the consultation, the psychoanalyst said 'I understand what you mean, Dr Frankl; however, if we start from the fact that obviously your patient had only suffered so deeply from the death of his wife because unconsciously he had hated her all along...' Frankl acknowledged that after 'five hundred hours' of psychotherapy the patient might be 'brainwashed' into thinking that he had in fact hated his wife all along, but pointed out that by doing so the patient would be deprived of the 'only treasure that he still possessed, namely, this ideal marital life they had built up, their true love...'. We can perhaps assume that the psychoanalyst believed that his reductionistic explanation of the patient's depression was a genuine method for curing the illness. If the patient could be brought to see that hatred of his wife was in fact the 'hidden cause' of his depression, then it seems that he would no longer need to be depressed, because there is nothing for him to grieve. Of course, it is also likely that there is nothing left for him to value either. In Frankl's view, it is better to uphold what the patient recognises as meaningful, and invite him to accept the pain and responsibility that follows from these meanings, especially if doing so is the only way of maintaining the value they offer.

As will perhaps already be clear, Frankl did not advance meaning as a way of resolving suffering. In many cases his therapy requires a patient to re-evaluate her situation and the attending suffering so as to incorporate the causes of suffering into her understanding of what makes her life valuable (her 'practical identity'). More often than not this re-evaluation requires that she accept the suffering as necessary. Thus, Frankl does not present meaning as a panacea; he is rather asserting that life can sustain value over and above our suffering.

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<sup>197</sup> *The Doctor and the Soul*, xxi.

<sup>198</sup> Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 109 & *The Doctor and the Soul*, 61-2

<sup>199</sup> Victor Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 26.

In summary, Frankl's message is that a person's life can have value if she chooses to act on the meanings that are available to her. This emphasis on responsibility corresponds with the Kantian idea that personal agency is the bedrock of our interest in reasons, and the basis of normativity. His approach to value is very much in keeping with the inter-subjective approach that I have discussed in this chapter, in that we would consider what it is that his patients valued, and offer suggestions as to how these might remain meaningful in the circumstances the patients are faced with. However, his position therefore carries the same limitations that I have mentioned in relation to the inter-subjective approach, i.e. it does not offer a systematic account of value, which could be applied to all patients, and which could be used to help patients who do not value their lives. On Frankl's approach, the patient who does not value her life is called to 'choose' differently. Though this is consistent with the Kantian approach to freedom, it would not be helpful for many people who are suffering. Spinoza, as we shall see, provides a general account of value and an alternative understanding of freedom.

#### 4.4 Degrees of Value

Though Frankl does not provide a general account of value he does observe that there are different kinds of value. I have discussed the need for principles that are coherent, and how values can therefore be more or less coherent. Another factor is the degree of conviction that a given principle brings. What I have in mind here is the sheer 'amplitude' of the value that we place in something; the force of our endorsement, or the degree of energy that we give in commitment to it. Roughly speaking, the more something matters to a person, the more they will be prepared to endure in remaining committed to it, and hence the more it will unify their life. We find examples of this in the extreme actions of martyrs: after being flogged before the council the apostles left 'rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name...'<sup>200</sup> Paul at one time articulates this idea of an overriding value in terms of a simple equation: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us'.<sup>201</sup> Frankl invokes a similar, though non-eschatological, notion of value when he describes the experience of ecstatic moments which can 'retroactively flood an entire life with meaning':

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<sup>200</sup> *Acts* 5:40-41.

<sup>201</sup> *Romans* 8:18.

‘Let us ask a mountain-climber who has beheld the alpine sunset and is so moved by the splendour of nature that he feels cold shudders running down his spine – let us ask him whether after such an experience his life can ever again seem wholly meaningless.’

The point is that some people find a value (or values) of such intensity that it pervades their lives. I think the Doctor’s relationship with his wife might qualify as this kind of value. Eichmann, by contrast, does not appear to hold a comparable value, for despite being clearly enamoured of the ‘winged words’ of high rhetoric, the values he invokes do not transform his speech and actions in the manner of a person truly devoted. In the end he is, as Arendt put it, a banal person.

In order to make theoretical use of this observation regarding the relationship between especially significant values and personal wholeness we need to establish a way of describing the scale of value. The standard non-theoretical description typically has the form of an exclamation or expression of feeling. For example, in witnessing an alpine sunset a person is likely to express feelings of awe or beauty: ‘that’s amazing!’, ‘Wow!’ Theoretically, this is problematic, firstly because it offers no formal way of grading our values, other than by subjective report (i.e. we can only ask how one feeling compares with another), and secondly because we also tend to think of feelings as either non-rational or passive (this, I would argue, is an indication of Kant’s influence). While it is undeniable that important values tend to invoke strong feelings, e.g. love, joy, grief, anger, etc, (feelings that we may describe as ‘passions’), it is also true that valuing (at least according to the neo-Kantian position) is essentially a matter of active endorsement, and so is not passive, i.e. it is not simply felt. The question is whether there is any other way of describing the different degrees of value. This apparent lack is in part at least attributable to our Cartesian heritage, because Cartesianism renders valuing a fundamentally subjective act. Kant’s notion of the moral law is meant to be an exception,<sup>202</sup> i.e. it is meant to provide a way out of this subjectivism, but leads to the sort of difficulties that have been discussed. Part of my argument is that these difficulties persist throughout the Kantian philosophical project.<sup>203</sup> In Korsgaard’s account, value remains

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<sup>202</sup> Recall here Kant’s praise of duty: ‘sublime and mighty ... ‘which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations and from which to be descended is the indispensable condition of the only worth which men alone give themselves’. Recall also that Kant said the moral law ‘fills the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on [it]’ (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 90). Tellingly, it is difficult to imagine Korsgaard saying any of this, and that – in my view – is because her conception of value, and her approach to the question of human dignity, is different. I explore her view of value more thoroughly in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>203</sup> It may be argued that Kant was moving to address this lack in his third Critique, which is concerned with aesthetic judgments. His discussion of the concept of the sublime would be particularly relevant here. I am unfortunately not able to pursue this question here, though I certainly think it would be a topic worth pursuing.

fundamentally subjective because it is said to result from an act of reflective endorsement. The ‘private reasons argument’ moves us from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, but this does not render a theory of value, such that we can characterise the varying degrees of value.

One might suggest that degrees of value are degrees of ‘meaning’. For example, someone might indicate that something is particularly valuable by saying that it ‘*means* a lot’, or that ‘it is *deeply meaningful*’. A person might describe the experience of climbing a mountain as ‘meaningful’, or say that her beloved ‘means everything’ to her. The question is whether this shift in terminology is any more useful than the terminology of feelings. Though it fits with Korsgaard’s broad theory of wholeness, it does not convey anything more about what is required for a person to become and remain whole.

#### 4.5 Purpose

When people talk about meaning they often talk about purpose in the same breath, as in the phrase ‘meaning and purpose’. Our purposes reflect our greater values. A purpose provides unity to our decisions by operating as an overriding reason, which both governs our thinking and generates many subsidiary reasons. We might think again here of religious martyrs, or indeed of anyone who is prepared to endure great hardship in the name of a cause, including those who aim to succeed in sports, arts, research, or whatever. In this connection Frankl quotes Nietzsche’s remark about ‘a man who has a why’ being ‘able to endure almost any how’, and also Jasper’s claim that a ‘man is ... the cause he makes his own’.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, it is sometimes through suffering that a person gains a clearer sense of what is most important, and this in turn enables her to become more whole. This was the view of Anne-Marie, a woman interviewed for a study by Balfour M. Mount of people suffering life threatening illnesses:

‘Anne-Marie, a 39-year-old single parent of four school children, had a complex medical history that included amputation of her left arm and shoulder for necrotizing fasciitis; autoimmune disease with associated peripheral vascular insufficiency and progressive loss of toes and fingers; a cardiac arrest; pneumonia; seizures; deep vein thrombosis; and osteomyelitis. As a child, she had grown up surrounded by a close, supportive, living family. In reflecting on her current horrific multiplicity of escalating medical problems she stated, “If you look from the outside, [my illness] is a bad experience. But it brought me to another point of view about life, about what’s really important and what is not. About what is the meaning

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A key question would be whether Kant can express the reality of the sublime beyond the subjective experience of a certain kind of feeling.

<sup>204</sup> Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 76.

of life, *really*. Why are we here? We are here for a certain period of time. We have some things to do and in my case I think it's to take care of my children and bring them to adulthood in the safest way."<sup>205</sup>

This is a powerful example of how a clear sense of purpose - i.e. of an important value – can hold a person together despite great adversity.

There are of course limits on what can qualify as a purpose, and these limits relate to the constraints of intelligibility that have been discussed. Purposes must be liveable: it must be possible for the person to consistently act out the rules involved. For example, I might especially value the *idea* of being a professional footballer, and could therefore want to make it my purpose to become a professional footballer. This purpose would not facilitate personal wholeness but work against it. Being a professional footballer entails being paid for playing football, and given certain facts about me and the conditions under which people are employed to play football, it is not possible for this to happen. No matter how much I value the idea of enacting such an identity, I could not remain whole while attempting to do so. I could of course be described as a *failed* professional footballer, but that proves the point. To fail to enact the rule contained in the meanings that comprise one's practical identity is to fail as the person one thinks oneself to be, and thus to fail to be unified. I would not rationally choose to do this because one does not deliberately set out to fail to be oneself (to make such a choice I would have to be profoundly deluded), and on Korsgaard's analysis, that is the essence of practical incoherence; it is equivalent to thinking 'there is a bad reason to x and so I will do x' (remembering that we identify what is 'good' and 'bad' on the basis of our rational reflection).

#### **4.6 Moral uncertainty and the extension of meaning**

Most people are capable of recognising the kinds of contradictions I have mentioned very quickly. Most of us learn to follow rules easily. Clearly the same is not true of wholeness (as it has been defined). A further reason for this may be that our rules are underdetermined when it comes to wholeness. There is no rule or set of rules that specifies exactly how an individual can live well. Part of the task of 'pulling oneself together' is discerning how the disparate meanings that constitute one's identity can be integrated in the light of inherent contradictions, the obstacles that are encountered, and the resources that are available. This is

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<sup>205</sup> Mount, Boston and Cohen, 'Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being', 378.

why Aristotelians emphasise the need to develop good judgement, or ‘*phronesis*’, in order to be able to identify goodness. Knowledge of goodness requires being able to apply the general rules that are given in one’s practical identity to one’s particular circumstances. These judgments must be both faithful to the values carried in those rules and responsive to the novelty of the situation. Kant discussed the necessity of such judgments in the following well known passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

‘... the power of judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced. Thus this is also what is specific to so-called mother-wit, the lack of which cannot be made good by any school; for, although a school can provide a limited understanding with plenty of rules borrowed from the insight of others and as it were graft these onto it, nevertheless the faculty for making use of them correctly must belong to the student himself ... A physician therefore, a judge, or a statesman, can have many fine pathological, juridical, or political rules in his head, of which he can even be a thorough teacher, and yet can easily stumble in their application ...’<sup>206</sup>

Although this passage arises in the context of Kant’s epistemological treatise, it may nonetheless be applied to his practical theories. The broad point is that being a good doctor/judge/statesman or whatever requires more than formal training; it requires the ability to see how the rules apply in particular circumstances (though what we meant by ‘good doctor etc.’ might be the subject of debate, for as noted in previous chapters, Kant maintains a distinction between moral goodness and, say, professional aptitude; Korsgaard’s analysis has, as I have shown, eroded this distinction).

A limitation of Kant’s characterisation of judgment is that it may seem to imply that we are only interested in meanings that have practical application (like the meanings found in instruction manuals). Our interest in meaning extends far beyond instructions; it extends to stories, icons, the archetypal, and all the imaginative meanings found in myth, religion, literature, and art. This interest may be traced back to the under-determination of rules and the corresponding need for judgments, in that these generate a need to ground our identity in meanings that have a broad and enduring application. In other words, we look for meanings that help us to hold onto a sense that our life is worth living while at the same time preparing us for novel situations that may threaten that sense. In stories, for example, we can find threads of meanings that allow us to see how values unfold in unfamiliar circumstances. We can learn from the ways that characters (whom we may or may not wish to emulate) attempt

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<sup>206</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A134/B173

to hold themselves together when met with certain challenges. In these ways stories can help us to make sense of situations that we cannot immediately comprehend, and so help us to make good judgements.<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.7 Inspiration

Raimond Gaita, following Simone Weil, attempts to distinguish a particular form of meaning, which may include stories, symbols, paintings or music, that can be regarded as ‘Good’ or ‘True’. A work is ‘Good’ or ‘True’ in this sense if it enables a person to sustain a love of life – a sense of Goodness, i.e. of life’s worth – while speaking ‘truthfully of the human condition, to our vulnerability to affliction and our relations to good and evil’.<sup>208</sup> He connects this idea with what Simone Weil describes as works of *genius*, and in her view there are only a few such works in Western Civilisation that qualify. She includes the Iliad, the Gospels, some books of the Old Testament, the plays of Aeschylus, some of Sophocles, some of Plato’s dialogues, King Lear, Racine’s *Phaedra* and some few others.<sup>209</sup> This is her list of works that truthfully describe the relations of the human spirit to good and evil. We might, as Gaita points out, debate what should be included in any such list, as it is in a sense deeply personal, and yet the list must nevertheless be short because the qualities involved are so rare:

‘The idea of such a list will not, I think, strike one as silly if one reflects on why Primo Levi would have added Dante to it. Nourished even in Auschwitz by the beauty of some passages in the *Canto of Ulyssesi*, Levi says, ‘[It is] as if I was also hearing it for the first time: like the blast of a trumpet, like the voice of God. For a moment I forget who I am and where I am’. Dismayed, almost desperate, when he forgets some lines, he writes that he ‘would give today’s soup’ to remember them. Other people will compose different lists and each list will excite a degree of intractable disagreement. But can anyone seriously think that a list of what could be food for the soul, as Dante was for Levi, would be much longer than Weil’s?’<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> There is a rich and wide ranging body of literature in which it is maintained that the self should be regarded as a kind of narrative or story. To properly summarise this literature would require a comprehensive review; something I am not presently able to do. It is from this theoretical standpoint that we arrive at the view that a person’s suffering and her path to recovering wholeness is best determined by attending to her personal story, e.g. by hearing what her illness ‘means’ to her. Such an approach to healthcare has been advanced by various authors, notably Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition*, and Arthur W. Frank *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*. For scholarly discussion of the broad theory and its application to bioethics see *Stories and Their Limits*, edited by Nelson.

<sup>208</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 225.

<sup>209</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 225. See also Weil’s ‘The Iliad or The Poem of Force’ in *Simone Weil: an Anthology*, esp. 213-5.

<sup>210</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 225.

This idea that certain meanings can ‘nourish the soul’ in the way described by Levi offers us a significant sense in which a meaning can be more-or-less ‘meaningful’, and a further sense in which meaning may be related to wholeness. The scale of value here ranges from the banal, false, superficial and trite (i.e. works that invoke notions of goodness that are unrealistic or not genuinely ‘good’, e.g. arguably anything produced by Disney) to the true, deep, and profound (works of genius).

I cannot explore Weil and Gaita’s position in more detail here as to do so would move us far away from Korsgaard’s theory of wholeness.<sup>211</sup> My present interest is in the idea that these ‘works of genius’ somehow provide people with a sense of value that sustains them through very difficult circumstances. One question is how a person comes to recognise and appreciate such genius. Gaita says that recognition does not come through intellectual argument. It is, he says, a kind of inspiration; a form of ‘spiritual understanding’.<sup>212</sup> Following Peter Winch, he says that ‘the deepest values of the life of the mind cannot be taught: they can only be shown’ and ‘only to those who have eyes to see.’<sup>213</sup> This view of goodness in some ways corresponds with the views of Aristotelians, Wittgensteinians and pragmatists who reject the practical use of metaphysics in ethical thinking.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, it seems to undercut the vision of philosophy that Gaita takes from Plato: philosophers as lovers of wisdom who are collectively and publicly engaged in searching for the ‘true and the good’ (a vision that is also espoused by Weil and Winch). As I have said already, if we do not have a shared understanding of what gives value to our lives, then our discussion is limited to the trading of examples. Examples, as Kant noted, assist the mind in learning rules, but they do not render true knowledge.<sup>215</sup>

In the next two chapters I will continue in what I take to be the Platonic spirit of philosophical inquiry by proceeding with my systematic study of the unity of the self. Having taken the Kantian framework to what I regard as its logical limit of inter-subjective reasoning, I will next consider how personal unity may be understood through an alternative ontology,

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<sup>211</sup> I will however make one clarification: Weil and Gaita are not saying that a person so inspired no longer suffers. It is the manner in which they suffer that is different. For both Weil and Gaita, being a person means being able to suffer, and acknowledging the vulnerability of the person means not accepting the ‘lie’ that the ‘virtuous’ person is exalted above ordinary human misery; that pain is not pain, grief is not grief, and so on (see for example Weil, p 215). In Korsgaard’s terms, this would mean holding on to what makes one the person one is and allowing, or perhaps accepting, the hurt that this entails. Obviously these thoughts are highly relevant to the broader questions of this thesis, and yet I cannot pursue them here for the reason just stated. They might indicate that our capacity to remain whole is at best limited, or that ‘true’ wholeness always entails a kind of brokenness. I will revisit some of these points in the next chapter.

<sup>212</sup> See for example Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 235

<sup>213</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 231. The two essays of Winch’s that I mentioned in footnote 19 of this chapter could be used to support this claim.

<sup>214</sup> Gaita discusses the notion of language ‘going dead’ on pages 234-5 of *A Common Humanity*.

<sup>215</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A135/B174.s

*viz.* Spinoza's. This ontology is not beholden to the Cartesian project, and so is able to provide an account of value that does not reduce to the exchange of reasons. It does not reveal 'goodness' in the same way as, say, Dante or Aeschylus, but it will provide a clearer understanding of why these works affect us as they do, and why some people are able to see goodness in them and others not.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed what I have called the inter-subjective account of value. This is the view that we learn about value through our shared meanings. I have discussed how the sharing of meanings implies a shared nature, and how this nature is disclosed when subjects agree in their judgments. I have argued this can successfully explain the force of our moral claims, but that it does not provide a general understanding of value, such that we can know how a person is held together. All that is shown is that we have a shared interest in this question, and that for better and for worse we learn from each other's example. I have discussed Victor Frankl's work as a supplement to this approach, and outlined the role of purpose, depth of value, and inspiration in holding certain people together. Further consideration could be given to the particular purposes or values that people typically commit themselves to (two examples I have mentioned are the witnessing of a mountain sunset, and a dying person's commitment to her family), or to the kind of works that inspire a sense of transcendent Goodness (in the example above this was Dante). My own inquiry does not take this path, but rather continues in the vein of metaphysical analysis. In the next two chapters I will discuss Spinoza's ontology and the account of wholeness that emerges from it, an account that can incorporate the various threads that have been introduced in this chapter, but also take us beyond them in our understanding of value.

## PART TWO

### A Spinozistic Theory of Personal Wholeness

## CHAPTER 5

### SPINOZA'S ONTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

It is claimed that a person may value her life 'as a whole' over and above her particular sufferings. It is also claimed that wholeness is a personal state that may be equated with health, and suffering is the opposite: a state of unwholeness that may be equated with ill health. In the preceding three chapters I have discussed a theory of the self that sets out to explain both how a person can be 'whole' and why this state is valuable. This account is grounded in the Kantian conception of the self as a rational agent. It conceives wholeness as the agreement of one's actions and self-conception. On this view, I am whole when I can act on reasons that I 'endorse' as expressive of myself. My life is unified – takes the form 'of a whole' – as my actions are based on an integrated body of reasons that I can endorse as expressive of myself. My 'self', according to this theory, is my rational consciousness governed by a 'practical identity', i.e. a conception of myself and what makes my life worthwhile. I have argued that while this theory successfully explains normativity, it does not explain how one achieves wholeness, because it does not offer an account of what we value, so as to explain how a person achieves wholeness. In the previous chapter I indicated how Korsgaard's position might be extended through what I described as an 'intersubjective' approach to value, and how this approach would inform my questions around wholeness.

In the next two chapters I discuss an alternative theory of wholeness. This conception is derived from Spinoza's ontology. While it overlaps on certain points with Korsgaard's theory, it goes further in that it carries a conception of value from which we may develop some answers to the question of how a person achieves wholeness. Wholeness, on the Spinozistic view, is the free expression of one's individual agency. In this respect it is like Korsgaard's. The difference is that for Spinoza the individual is a unique agent essentially interactive with other agents. The person is not an artefact of rational decisions governed by a coherent 'self-conception' (a practical identity), and so the whole person is not the agreement of personally chosen reasons and one's self conception. Wholeness is rather determined by the manner in which the person acts in response to the other agencies that she encounters, i.e. in the way in which opportunities and challenges are met.

Value, on Spinoza's account, concerns the quality of our actions, the degree to which we are free to actualise our 'natural' potential. This bears some resemblance to Korsgaard's

characterisation of value as ‘reflective success’, i.e. as the rationally informed endorsement of one’s actions; yet it is substantially different. For Spinoza, knowledge of agency resides primarily in the agent herself, and always has an affective form. It is not primarily a rational representation of her agency. Perfect agency *is* itself perfect knowledge, which Spinoza describes as ‘the intellectual love of God’, or – we might say – the joy of being itself. Imperfect agency is known through the affects of joy, sadness and desire. These affects are perceptions, but they are closer to the nature of the individual than reasons, which are abstractions according to general rules. Thus, the ability of the agent to self-actualise is what primarily governs our evaluative judgments, and this is known through her affects, not through her reasons. Reason has a role as intermediate and general knowledge of how an agent acts, and to the extent that we are reliant on this knowledge Korsgaard’s theory remains applicable. So, on the Spinozistic account, the agent’s concern with building and maintaining integrity (in forming her life ‘as a whole’) is not based on a need to ensure that her reasons and self-conception are mutually coherent, but is rather based on her concern with actualising her nature, and sustaining or increasing her power.

On the Spinozistic view Wittgenstein’s ability to value his life ‘as a whole’ relates to his power to be ‘himself’. This power was maintained by his integrated response to the circumstances of his life, and also by the support and inspiration he received through others (‘others’ here includes both the people he knew, the socio-economic structures that supported him, and the ‘world’ as he came to know it). Ilych, by contrast, had limited power to be himself. He had lived in ways that conformed with societal expectations and which seemed to him to be ‘good’, but they were not good because they alienated him from others and ultimately from himself. He did not seriously examine his own nature, and so did not express that nature in an integrated way. In contemplating his death he remembered periods in his childhood when he was most free to be ‘himself’, but everything since then now seemed to be ‘wrong’. In his comfortable life he had become passive, ineffectual, and devoid of genuine community. He was therefore not ‘whole’, but miserable.

In this chapter I outline Spinoza’s basic ontology, ethics and epistemology; show how these ideas relate to the concept of personal wholeness, and how they advance our understanding of what is necessary for wholeness to be achieved (and hence how they go beyond the theory of wholeness offered by Korsgaard). In the next chapter I redescribe the ‘Spinozistic theory of wholeness’ from the standpoint of the individual, and discuss certain particular ways that a person can increase her power-of-acting so as to become and remain whole.

This chapter begins with a summary of the previous four, and a review of the Cartesian starting point behind the Kantian approach. I am emphasising this because many of the differences between Korsgaard and Spinoza can be traced to the difference in their starting points. Whereas Kantians, as post-Cartesians, start with the certainties of conscious thought and experience, Spinoza starts with an analysis of being. Having reviewed this Cartesian approach, I then briefly outline Spinoza's intellectual context, explain his analysis of being, and the account of individuation that follows from this. This brings us to a broad understanding of the Spinozistic account of wholeness: wholeness as the perfect response of the individual to her 'complement in nature' with which she is essentially interactive. The question then becomes how a person can know her own nature, and the complement she is interacting with. To address this question I explain Spinoza's accounts of value and of knowledge (which are closely related). I close the chapter with a summary of how this account of wholeness differs to Korsgaard's.

### **5.1. A summary of the previous chapters**

In chapter two I briefly indicated the varying accounts of 'wholeness' that have been offered in the philosophies of Descartes, Locke, Hume, before developing a detailed exploration of the account offered by Kant. Kant argued that unity of the self is necessary for the self to be capable of both knowledge and rational action. He conceived this unified self as constituted by its capacity for reason, and held that this unity could be expressed practically through moral action, i.e. action that is in accordance with 'pure practical reason'. Pure practical reason is reason devoid of all empirical content; it is reason as universal law. In this way Kant divides the person into a rational 'noumenal' self and an empirical 'phenomenal' self, the first being the origin of 'moral' value, and the second of 'non-moral' value. The personal incentive to act in accordance with this conception of moral value is related to our freedom, or individual dignity or 'autonomy'. It is, says Kant, actions that are based on respect for the moral law that are free action, because that respect is based solely on reason and our desires. He argues that it is this freedom that gives us dignity, and that makes us different from the other animals. Clearly a person's interest in this conception of value depends on how seriously she is concerned for Kant's conception of freedom. I argued that while there does seem to be a link between principled action and freedom (and dignity), the principles that people identify with are not principles of pure practical reasons but are typically related to their personal histories, and hence the content of their 'phenomenal' life. Moreover, Kant's

theory effectively renders wholeness – i.e. the agreement of moral and non-moral interests – a contingent state, i.e. a state over which the autonomous self has little control.

In chapter three I presented Christine Korsgaard's development of Kant's moral theory. This theory in part address the concerns I identified in relation to Kant, but it is still very much influenced by his metaphysical framework, and in particular his distinction between moral and non-moral value. Korsgaard conceives the moral life as a movement towards unity, and unity as the agreement of one's reasons and one's self-conception ('practical identity'). This drive toward unity is, she argues, based in our capacity for self-conscious rational reflection, and the need this generates to act on reasons. In my view, this account is an improvement on Kant in that it links virtue with values or principles that are identified by the individual rational agent (as opposed to the universal laws of 'pure practical reason'). However, in doing so it departs from Kant's particular conception of the moral value, i.e. human freedom conceived as independence from empirical influence, and thereby makes 'moral value' secondary to 'general' or 'non-moral' value, in the sense 'moral value' is dependent on a person agreeing that there is something that makes her life worth living. What it is exactly that makes a person's life worth living is left unanswered, and so there is no specification of the sorts of principles one should act upon (other than those that are considered necessary for there to be a 'practical identity', but our adherence to these is dependent on our having a practical identity). So, although Korsgaard connects the moral life with a conception of wholeness, she cannot tell us how wholeness is achieved or maintained.

In chapter four I considered some possible ways of extending Korsgaard's account of wholeness so as to develop a more substantial understanding of what it is that makes life worth living. I argued that the coherent use of reasons entails a genuine connection to 'reality', and that this provides a basis for a form of ethical certainty, i.e. confidence that certain reasons are more truly expressive of our 'nature' than others. To identify what these reasons are one must consider the ways that a person can coherently think about the value of her life, i.e. which values 'make sense' to her. In contrast to Kant, and also Spinoza, this approach to value is not grounded on metaphysics, but is governed by the standing ethical judgments of individuals and communities. Value, on this approach, is identified through ethical discourse. Having set out the logical basis of this approach, I then introduced some of the concepts that are current in discussions about value, illness and dying, *viz.* the concepts of coherence, meaning, purpose, depth, and inspiration. These ideas, I argued, may be usefully incorporated into Korsgaard's general account of wholeness, and clearly have some importance, and hence I do not dismiss the possibility that further research in this direction

may lead to useful insights. However, as they are not metaphysically grounded, they cannot provide a systematic account of value, and hence cannot answer what I regard as the fundamental questions, such as what it is that makes a life meaningful, coherent or inspired, etc.

Chapters two, three and four could be read as an attempt to set out the limitations of the Kantian approach. The Kantian tradition cannot (or at least should not) be ignored by anyone thinking about moral philosophy. It has had an enormous influence on western thought; an influence that is I think expressed in the sorts of ideas discussed in the previous chapter, which have in turn had an influence on our understanding of health and healthcare. Yet on the basis of my own inability to use these ideas to substantially advance our understanding of the connection between ethics and wellbeing, I believe that we should look beyond the Kantian approach, and indeed the Cartesian principles on which Kant's philosophy is founded (and which have been foundational to almost all of western philosophy since Locke; English speaking philosophy at least). In particular, we need to move to an alternative understanding of the self, of how the self is related to the world, and of how the self is valued. It is in this way that I come to Spinoza. In this chapter I will provide a basic outline of Spinoza's philosophy, and introduce the concepts that are necessary to understand his account of the self. In the next chapter I will develop a Spinozistic account of personal wholeness and discuss how this relates to our understanding of suffering.

### **5.1.1 Review of the Cartesian starting point**

Before turning to Spinoza's philosophy it will be useful to recall the ontological foundations of the Kantian position so that it will be clear how Spinoza's philosophy is different. I will do this by retracing the link between Korsgaard's position and Descartes' cogito.

Korsgaard's position is that we each make decisions by endorsing reasons, and that our endorsement of particular reasons is governed by our self understanding, or practical identity. This identity is established and developed through the ongoing process of self reflection and decision making. Wholeness, on this view, means 'reflective success', i.e. the condition whereby one enacts reasons that are endorsed under one's current practical identity. This requires a practical identity that generates reasons that can be sustainably enacted through the course of one's life (hence the link with coherence). Value, in this account, is existential, in that it arises in the self reflection of the individual, but it is also cognitive, in

that it is formed through the reasons or meanings through which those reflections are named and remembered.

Korsgaard arrives at her position via two phenomenological claims, *viz.* that we need reasons to make decisions, and that we identify with the reasons that we act upon. From here her account of morality proceeds by analysis of what is entailed in the use of reasons, i.e. in order to use reasons I must have a self conception, using reasons connects me with other rational agents, and so on and so forth. It is the initial idea about our identification with reasons that underpins her account of normativity, and her subsequent claim that the ethical drive is a drive toward unity. This notion of identification may be described as the ontological bedrock of her discussion. Here I want to review why she built her argument on this particular foundation, and to indicate why Spinoza was able to start elsewhere.

As I outlined in chapter two, Kantian philosophy proceeds by way of transcendental argument. Transcendental arguments show the conditions of the possibility of something that is evident or assumed. In his first critique Kant takes as ‘evident’ that there is experience (the bedrock of empiricist philosophy) and thought. Similarly, in his moral philosophy, and Korsgaard’s redevelopment of that philosophy, what is evident is our need to act using reasons. So, in this respect Korsgaard is following Kantian tradition. Let us therefore go back a step further and consider why Kantian philosophy is reliant on transcendental argument.

Kant’s philosophy, as he himself states in the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is motivated by a need to respond to Hume’s scepticism. Hume’s scepticism is the result of his rigorous application of empiricist principles, i.e. that all knowledge must be constructed on what is manifest in experience, *viz.* conscious impressions. These principles follow Descartes’ idea that conscious experience was the only thing that was indubitably certain. Cartesian doubt led to empiricist philosophy, and empiricist philosophy led to Humean scepticism. Kant’s response to Humean scepticism was transcendental philosophy. In this way Kantian philosophy is a legacy of Cartesian doubt. So, to move beyond transcendental argument one needs to address Cartesian doubt, which made conscious experience the foundation of knowledge and predicated the psychological life of human beings on the austere reading of the intellect as that which distinguishes us from animals.<sup>216</sup> Spinoza, as I am about to explain, provides one way of going beyond the limitations of this approach.

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<sup>216</sup> An alternative strategy would be to maintain a form of empiricism over and against Hume’s scepticism. I am accepting, along with Kant, that Hume’s development of the empiricist project is correct.

Before moving on, it may be helpful to note a distinction between the respective starting points of Kantian epistemology and Kantian moral theory, as the latter is somewhat closer to Spinoza's position. While Kantian epistemology involves analysis of the preconditions of experience and thought, Kantian moral theory is based on an analysis of the need to act. I have described this need as phenomenological, and in a sense it is: it is something that we can observe 'in ourselves' through conscious reflection, much like we observe our experiences. On the other hand, it differs from other kinds of phenomena in the sense that it must be assumed in the very act of reflection. In order to notice that I have a need to act on reasons, I must first perform an act of reflecting. I must, in other words, exercise control. So, we might say that it is action, or – to go a step further – *causality* (rather than the need for reasons) that is foundational to Kantian moral theory. This is the starting point of Spinoza's philosophy. The difference, as I hope to show, is that whereas Kantian moral theory proceeds to focus on our use of reasons, Spinoza's system is established on an analysis of causality itself.

## 5.2 Spinoza's intellectual context

Spinoza's philosophy is notoriously difficult for the uninitiated. This is partly because it is written in an intellectual context unlike our own, and uses concepts and responds to problems that are unfamiliar.<sup>217</sup> This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive exposition of Spinoza's theory; rather, it is a selective presentation of a process of thought that speaks to the questions of this thesis. It is therefore inevitable that I pass over a number of the more difficult aspects of Spinoza's theory, and ignore certain exegetical difficulties. I include the following biographical details so as to convey something of the depth of his philosophy, and the range of questions that it may be applied to (many of which are far beyond this current discussion).

Spinoza was raised as a Jew, and though he was expelled from his Jewish community at age 24 and never elected to return, he was still identified as a Jew by his friends. He was educated in the Jewish tradition by eminent scholars of the time, reading the Hebrew bible, rabbinic scholarship, and Jewish philosophy. In Portugal, his family had been marranos, which meant a life of exile, secrecy, insecurity, and double meaning. Though he never joined any particular community after his expulsion, and though he had no interest in Christian polemics, he lived in a predominantly Protestant country, the majority of his friends were

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<sup>217</sup> Richard Mason has suggested that part of what makes interpreting Spinoza's work especially difficult is 'the richness and multiplicity of its contexts'. Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 1.

Protestant, and his preference seems to have been toward Protestant religious practice, most likely because of the comparative lack of dogma and ritual. He did live for a time amongst a group of Protestants who identified themselves as separate from the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church, and whose approach to religious service and confessional matters was – relatively speaking – ‘free and flexible’<sup>218</sup>, though these friends would not have regarded him as a Christian. The Netherlands during his lifetime was comparatively open and free, and this freedom was very important to Spinoza, as is evident in his political and religious writings. He had a great interest in science, particularly physics, and he saw philosophy as involving both physics and metaphysics. He engaged very closely with the new Cartesian philosophy, and published a study of Descartes’ thinking, though his own philosophy explicitly rejects several key Cartesian principles. Like Descartes, he was versed in the scholastic terminology of the medieval era, and so terms like substance, essence and cause are central to his writing (though in his use these terms take on distinct meanings). The themes in his political writing are concurrent with those in Hobbes, who – along with Machiavelli – had a significant influence on his thinking. Other influences include several other lesser known thinkers of the time, such as Isaac La Peyrère (a pioneer of textual interpretation of the bible) and Franciscus van den Enden (who probably taught Spinoza Latin and introduced him to Cartesian philosophy). There are, finally, strands of thinking from the classical era, in particular, stoicism.<sup>219</sup>

Of these various themes the most pertinent to this discussion are Spinoza’s relationship to Descartes, and his analysis of causality and freedom. His relationship to Descartes is relevant because it allows us to see how he differs from Kant and the empiricists. His analysis of causality and freedom is important because it is through this that we come to his understanding of value, of individuation, and of wholeness. The implications of his conception of God for religious doctrine are also relevant, particularly as this informs the way that many people understand and respond to suffering, but I will not pursue these in any depth (though the practical implications of his conception of eternity will be outlined in the next chapter).

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<sup>218</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806*, 395. Cited in Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 6.

<sup>219</sup> The introduction to Mason’s *The God of Spinoza* comprises an extended description of these themes and discussion of their relevance to reading Spinoza.

### 5.3 *Causa Sui: God-or-Nature*

Spinoza's ontology is built around his conception of God, which is derived from his analysis of being. One cannot properly understand his account of value or of the individual unless one first understands this conception of God, at least in broad outline.

Spinoza's analysis of being begins with the idea that being necessarily involves a kind of causality or power. This idea is expressed in the opening definition of part one of *The Ethics*: 'By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, *or* whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing'. The idea of something that is the 'cause of itself' is the idea of something that exists by its own power. Anything that exists that is not the cause of itself must be caused to exist by something else.<sup>220</sup> It follows from this that there necessarily exists a being that is the cause of itself, and that such a being must be infinitely powerful. The argument may be restated in the following form:

1. Existence requires power
2. If the power of something is limited then the existence of that thing is limited<sup>221</sup>
3. Any power that is limited must be limited by another power
4. There necessarily exists a power that is not limited, i.e. a being that is the cause of itself.

To deny 4 one would have to deny 3. This would be to suggest that the greatest power that exists is limited either by something weaker or of equal power, which is in turn limited by something else, and so on until we are forced to conclude that being is limited by non-being, which for Spinoza is absurd. So, if anything exists, then something must exist that is the cause-of-itself. As Descartes observed in his 'cogito ergo sum', I know that I exist, and so – following Spinoza – I must conclude that a being that is the cause of itself must also exist.<sup>222</sup> The critical difference here between Spinoza and Descartes is that where Descartes' philosophy is grounded on the consciousness of thought (cogito), Spinoza's is grounded on existence itself (sum). So, whereas Descartes inferred being from consciousness in order to

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<sup>220</sup> This is a summary of Spinoza's so called 'ontological proofs' for the existence of God. For the full discussion see Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, 85-90 (All citations from Spinoza 'Ethics' henceforth referred to by 'Part' and 'definition' or 'proposition' with associated numbers, unless otherwise stated).

<sup>221</sup> Ethics, PI, prop. 11. Also: 'Being finite is really, in part, a negation, and being infinite is an absolute affirmation of existence in some nature...' Ethics PI, prop. 8, scholium 1.

<sup>222</sup> 'So, either nothing exists or an absolutely infinite Being also exists. But we exist, either in ourselves, or in something else, which necessarily exist.' Ethics PI, prop. 11.

overcome doubt, and thus regarded epistemology as prior to ontology, Spinoza did not accept doubt as a possible starting point, because being is already certain in the act of thinking, and thus he regarded ontology as prior to epistemology.<sup>223</sup> The primacy of action is, as I noted above, the first point of connection between Kantian and Spinozistic moral theory, though, as I also noted, there is a sharp divergence from this point on (though as I shall show there are various points of convergence and overlap).

Spinoza describes the being that is the cause of itself variously as God, Substance, Nature, and also God-or-Nature. This being is necessarily singular and unique, as two infinitely powerful beings would limit each other hence not be infinite. As God-or-Nature is without limit, his existence is both eternal and infinite. This means that his existence expresses itself in every possible way, and thus God-or-Nature is the cause of the existence of everything that can possibly exist: ‘whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God’,<sup>224</sup> and ‘From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect)’.<sup>225</sup> This includes us. Spinoza’s conception of the person comes from his understanding of what it is to be a finite durational being ‘created’ by, or rather existing within the activity of the infinite eternal God-or-Nature. It is this relationship between infinite eternal action to finite individual that we must understand in order to understand his conception of the self, and from this his understanding of what it is for a self to be whole.

Note that at this point of the discussion we cannot rely on analogy with those ‘beings’ familiar to us in the ‘common order of nature’, because those beings (including us) are all limited. We are dealing at this point with pure metaphysics, which means that we are purely reliant on conceptual argument; the logic, not examples. There is no example that could illustrate God-or-Nature because, as the Judaic tradition so strongly insists, ‘no one can see God’.<sup>226</sup> This does not, of course, mean that the metaphysics is unrelated to the practical, ordinary and familiar. The title of Spinoza’s major work – Ethics – should be enough to indicate his concern with the practical. I will not here try to address the question of how a metaphysical theory is ultimately evaluated. In brief, I would argue that good philosophical

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<sup>223</sup> Though it seems that Descartes conception of ideas was closer to Spinoza than that of the empiricists (e.g. Locke’s notion of ideas as ‘objects of the understanding’): see Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 58-9, esp. footnote 3. I will not explore the finer points of this comparison here as it is not directly relevant to the main argument. The key point is Spinoza’s philosophy is primarily ontological.

<sup>224</sup> Ethics, PI, prop. 15.

<sup>225</sup> Ethics, PI, prop. 16.

<sup>226</sup> John 1.18. The whole verse reads: ‘No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.’ Here is the essential difference between Christianity and Spinoza’s theology: Christians refer to revelation as the primary source of knowledge of God, while Spinoza refers to metaphysical reasoning.

theory must come to bear on our existing thought, but also that we cannot require a theory to be straightforwardly intelligible from the standpoint of that existing thought. Rather, we should be open to the possibility that our thinking may be improved through studying the theory and subjecting it to rational critique, and that this improvement may alter our understanding of any examples that we might use. Spinoza's metaphysics is an example, in that it proposes a rethink of the way that we understand 'ordinary', 'familiar' objects, including our own bodies, as I hope to show through the following discussion.

#### 5.4 Individuation

The metaphysics of the individual is an especially difficult aspect of Spinoza's philosophy. This may be because it was an area of Spinoza's system that was left unfinished or underdeveloped. Roger Scruton concludes that 'The identity, separateness, and self-sufficiency of the person all seem to be denied by Spinoza',<sup>227</sup> and that 'the self, or subject, the focal point of Descartes reasoning, is 'missing' from his philosophy'.<sup>228</sup> A very different exposition is offered by H. F. Hallett, and it is this account that I shall present here. However, Hallett does concede that 'Spinoza presents no formal unified account of the relations holding between *Natura Naturata* [i.e. God as expressed in actuality] and its finite parts' and that the distinction between the finite modes as eternal and durational 'is left by Spinoza in unusual obscurity – at least from the point of view of the modern mind, obstinately adhering to the principles of a truncated empiricistic positivism'.<sup>229</sup> In this section I will offer a short summary of how his theory moves from 'God-or-Nature' to finite person, focusing on the points that are most relevant to our understanding of wholeness.

As just outlined, everything is created by God-or-Nature, and has its being in God-or-Nature. The problem is explaining how finite, durational, divisible beings emerge from a being that is infinite, eternal, and indivisible.<sup>230</sup> How is it that the finite beings are divisible, and divided from each other, when the infinite being which causes them to exist is not? And how is it that an infinite external power generates individuals that are finite and durational?

In the first part of the *Ethics* Spinoza describes 'particular things' as 'nothing but affections of God's attributes *or* modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain

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<sup>227</sup> Scruton, *Spinoza: A Very Short introduction*, 56.

<sup>228</sup> Scruton, *Spinoza: A Very Short introduction*, 75. He goes on to say that Spinoza 'True to the method of adequate ideas... can find no way to insert, into the heart of the universe, the subjective viewpoint from which it is surveyed' (p 76).

<sup>229</sup> Hallett, *Benedict De Spinoza*, 34 & 44.

<sup>230</sup> We must say that God is indivisible, because division entails limitation (a part being less than a whole), and God, as has been established, must be without limit.

and determinate way'.<sup>231</sup> In Spinoza's terminology, 'attributes' of God are not characteristics or qualities of God (e.g. God's strength or God's wisdom), but different 'aspects' by which God's essence (i.e. his being) may be intelligible.<sup>232</sup> God, says Spinoza, has infinite attributes, though we are only familiar with two of them, *viz.* thought and extension. Thought and extension, or 'mind' and 'body' as they also known, are different ways in which being may be considered or apprehended. For example, we can think of the eye (or more precisely the system of visual perception) in respects of its bodily existence (the cornea, lens, retina, optic nerve, brain processing centres, and so on) and also in respects of its mental existence (vision). For Spinoza, these are not two ontologically distinct substances or 'natures', they are the same thing perceived in respect of two different attributes. This is of course only one example; one small 'part' of God-or-nature. The point is that God-or-Nature, either in part or in entirety, can be considered through different attributes. I will not discuss this further here, as the question we are considering here is how the different parts are generated. Thus, our present concern is to understand what Spinoza means when he defines individual things as 'affects' or 'modes' of God's attributes.<sup>233</sup>

'Affects' or 'modes' are the definite expression of God's being. They are ways in which substance affects or modifies itself as it 'actualises' in determinate ways. To understand this one must consider what it means to conceive God as self-caused substance, i.e. as infinite unhindered creative potency. Creative potency is for Spinoza the power to bring things into being (this is what causality means for Spinoza). Thus, for Spinoza, creativity is the essence of what God is: it is the 'nature' of God to create. However, as there is no other creative substance besides God-or-Nature, it follows that God-or-Nature may also be regarded as that which it creates: everything that exists (including those things that contemplate existence and their power so to do). God must therefore be regarded as both potentiality and actuality. Now, regarded as potentiality God-or-Nature is indeterminate, but regarded as actuality (the totality of existence) it is fully determinate.<sup>234</sup> *Individuation* occurs in the transition from potentiality to actuality, i.e. as God's agency is determined, or 'actualised', in a particular ways. Thus, an individual thing is an affect or mode of God's power: God-or-Nature determined in a certain way (and for us, apprehended in either the attribute of thought or the attribute of extension).<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ethics, PI, prop. 25.

<sup>232</sup> Ethics, PI, definition 4.

<sup>233</sup> For further discussion of Spinoza doctrine of attributes see Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 16-8.

<sup>234</sup> 'Exhaustively determinate', to use Hallett's phrase. Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 31.

<sup>235</sup> It is helpful to compare the definition in part I with the demonstration of proposition 6 of Part III: 'singular things are modes by which God' attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way... that is ... things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts...' Ethics PIII, prop. 6.

As a determination of God's power, an individual is itself an agent: a power that brings something into being. This 'something' that is brought into being is itself an agent bringing something into being ... and so on to infinity. In this way infinitely many things follow from the divine nature, 'from the highest to the very lowest grade of perfection', 'everything that is conceivable by infinite intellect'.<sup>236</sup> The notion of 'grades of perfection' comes from the varying degrees of power by which agents are constituted. The more power that is in something, the more real or 'perfect' it is. Each agent is affected in certain ways by the agents that it interacts with, in varying ways according to the kind of thing that it is and degree of power (or reality) that is in it. Where these interactions are co-operative, the agency of the thing is enhanced. Where they are obstructive, the agency of the thing is diminished. Each agent expresses itself according to its nature and so doing enhances some and diminishes others. In this way there are created beings of every degree of existence, or – to say the same thing in a different way – every degree of 'perfection'.

As an 'affect' of mutually determining determinations of God-or-Nature, the individual cannot be conceived apart from those other agents by which (or whom) it is affected. Hallett describes the other agents with which the agent interacts as its 'complement in nature'.<sup>237</sup> The totality of actualised being may 'thus be symbolised as an infinite 'web' or 'lattice' of which the infinite finite agents are the 'nodes' operating so as to form the indivisibility integrity of the whole.'<sup>238</sup> The integrity of the whole is maintained because each individual exists in relation to everything else. Indeed, because the being of an individual consists in its power, it is 'more' of an individual the more it 'agrees' with its complement in nature.<sup>239</sup> This means that the 'divisibility' or separateness that we associate with individuals is only apparent.

We are inclined to think of individuals as separable and divisible because we think of them as bounded 'objects' discernable in space and time, which are both separable from each other and divisible into further objects (this inclination may be an instance of the 'truncated empiricistic positivism' that Hallett referred). These objects are not individuals as Spinoza conceives them, but are what he describes as 'imaginational' ideas of individuals, which is to

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<sup>236</sup> Ethics, PI, appendix. In limiting the universe to that which is conceivable by an infinite intellect Spinoza is limiting existence to that which is logically possible. There is no power that can create, say, a square circle.

<sup>237</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 36.

<sup>238</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 38. Note here that this symbol may be misleading as it is a spatial representation, in which the parts ('nodes') are situated in different sectors. Its usefulness arises from the interconnectedness of each node, and the thought that removing one causes others to unravel.

<sup>239</sup> 'Coapt agents, in proportion to their co-aptitude, *maintain* their individuality, which is *constituted* by their community. *Natura* is not a 'thing', and its 'parts' are not *sectors* of a thing, but *microcosms* which, as finite expressions of the macrocosm, live by community with their congruent complement in the macrocosm. Thus, their integrity enhances not destroys, their individuality.' Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 38, footnote 1. See also 33.

say that they are perceptions of a durational mind as it interacts with its complement-in-nature. To perceive an agent in space and time is not to perceive it as it ‘really’ is, i.e. as it is in God-or-Nature.<sup>240</sup> To know what it ‘really’ is one must know what it is as an agent: how it affects and is affected by other beings.

The relationship between agents as parts within a whole may be imperfectly illustrated by considering the relationships that exist within systems that are known to us through common experience. For example, the human body is a whole, with various parts performing various functions, e.g. the eye, the hand, the blood, and so on. Each of these ‘parts’ may themselves be regarded as a ‘whole’ with further parts, and so on; at least as far as different agents can be identified.<sup>241</sup> It is only as the parts are rightly related that they are able to function, and so – according to Spinoza’s ontology – *be* the things that they are. When these connections are disrupted, disorganised, or severed, the parts stop functioning and so cease to be.

I described the human body of common human experience is an ‘imperfect’ illustration of the reality of the individuals in God-or-Nature because individuals as they exist in God-or-Nature are eternal, while the objects as they are known in common human experience (e.g. hand, eyes, etc) are durational. The distinction between eternal and durational is a central aspect of Spinoza’s system. Simply stated, eternal being is power as it is fully (or perfectly) actualised. Durational being, on the other hand, is power that is frustrated, i.e. imperfectly actualised. Durational being involves a ‘present’ with a conscious past and an anticipated future, and is characterised by struggle and resistance. Eternal existence is uninhibited actualisation of potential, and so involves no thought of past, present or future, but simply is. Thus, the common conception of eternity as unending or indefinitely extended existence is incoherent, because eternity has no beginning or end. The things that are known to us through ordinary experience appear to us as durational in so far as we know

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<sup>240</sup> In this respect Spinoza’s view of objects and space is comparable to Kant’s.

<sup>241</sup> This point is made clear in one of Spinoza’s letters to Henry Oldenburg. Oldenburg had asked him ‘how we know how each part of Nature agrees with the whole to which it belongs and how it coheres with the others’. In his response Spinoza says ‘I do not know absolutely how they really cohere and how each part agrees with its whole. To know this would require knowing the whole of Nature and all its parts. So I shall try to show as briefly as I can the reason which forces me to affirm this... By the coherence of parts, then, I understand nothing but that the laws *or* nature of the one part so adapt themselves to the laws *or* nature of the other parts that they are opposed to each other as little as possible. Concerning whole and parts, I consider things as parts of some whole insofar as the nature of the one so adapts to the nature of the other that so far as possible they are all in harmony with one another. But in so far as they are out of harmony with one another, to that extent each forms an idea distinct from the others in the mind, and therefore it is considered as a whole and not as a part’. Spinoza then offers ‘blood’ as an illustration, with different parts (‘chyle, lymph, and the like’) constituting one fluid. He goes on to imagine a ‘worm in the blood’ that could distinguish these different particles and their different ‘motions’, and so consider each part as a whole. This worm, says Spinoza, ‘would live in this blood as we do in this part of the universe’. Letter 32, Curley, *A Spinoza Reader*, 82-3 (original emphasis).

them as limited by their interaction with others. Yet all beings, however limited, are also eternal, for in order to have any reality at all they must be a determination of eternal power. This is not to say that an individual has an eternal part and a durational part (this is not another variant of the Kantian bifurcation). It would be more accurate to say that the durational part is a confused or inadequate idea of the eternal, for an individual's durational existence is a degradation of its eternal existence; yet this would be misleading if it were interpreted as meaning that the durational life is illusory. The effort of durational existence (conatus) is real, yet it is a reality striving against annihilation, and as such it falls short of perfect reality which is the complete actualisation of God-or-Nature.<sup>242</sup>

The 'descent' from eternal perfection to durational endeavour results from the infinitely diverse and infinitely graded individuation of God-or-Nature. The infinite determinations of God-or-Nature are only more-or-less accommodating to each other, and in so far as they are unaccommodating they are mutually limiting. 'Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being'<sup>243</sup>, and 'things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other'. In other words, whenever one power is set against another power of the same kind it either limits or is limited by that other power, and thus power is frustrated and eternal being is reduced to durational being.<sup>244</sup> The condition of durationality is therefore a condition that arises from the 'self-reference' of the individual. Our own 'present life' involves transition along this continuum of being, as we think of ourselves now in isolation (through 'self-reference') and now as essentially related to others (i.e. referred to God). As the individual strives to assert itself it encounters opposition in the other self-referent beings that are also asserting themselves according the power that is in them. The solution to this problem is to adapt one's activity to those others with which one is interacting: to join oneself to those whose natures are agreeable, and to avoid or destroy those whose natures are contrary. By aligning one's agency with others one becomes 'free' to enjoy 'eternal' existence. This is the central principle of Spinoza's ethical doctrine.

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<sup>242</sup> This distinction between eternal and durational existence is arguably the most difficult aspect of Spinoza's system. What is perhaps most troubling is the manner in which our finite existence can be thought of as eternal. Despite this difficulty, I believe that this is pivotal to Spinoza's position, and for this reason I will persist in using the concept of the eternal in my characterisation of Spinozistic unity. In my view, this usage is partly validated by the conclusions that are discussed in the next chapter, i.e. as the characterisation is applied to certain problems raised in previous chapter and used to interpret various examples. I recognise that other scholars would wish for further discussion, but must leave this for a future project.

<sup>243</sup> Ethics, PIII, Prop. 6.

<sup>244</sup> See also Ethics, PII, axiom 2.

## 5.5 The Spinozistic conception of wholeness

The distinction between eternal and durational existence is foundational to the Spinozistic conception of wholeness. So far I have only described this distinction in the broadest possible outline, and as such it may remain obscure. Rather than attempt to explain it further in the abstract, I will instead move to describe the basis of self-reference, the boundaries of the self, and then Spinoza's ethical and epistemological doctrines. These will allow for more concrete illustration of the individual in more-or-less unified states. However, before moving to these topics, I will first state this conception of wholeness in the terms that are now available.

Individual wholeness, in the Spinozistic ontology, means the free expression of the individual's nature. A person's nature is her 'true' (or 'real') power in the totality of God-or-Nature; the power of which she is constituted as a determination of God-or-Nature. In other words, a person is whole (or integrated) in so far as she can act in ways that are 'true' to herself, and not whole (or disintegrated) in so far as she is unable to act in ways that are not true to herself. A person exercises that nature in so far as she is the immanent cause of her activities. This is what it means to act freely. A person is not free in so far as her action is controlled by the nature of other agents.

All finite individuals, individuated in the mutually determining activity of God-or-Nature, are affected by and affect the activity of other agents. Wholeness is achieved by moderating one's nature in response to these others, i.e. through knowledge of the various powers that are restricting and enabling certain actions, and actualisation one's nature in accordance with this knowledge. For example, a person whose hands are chained together is no longer free to move his hands in the way that he would were they not chained. Equally, I am not free to glide off a cliff-face, as I might be if I had wings, or – more realistically – a glider (as things are presently, if I jump I will plummet). Similarly, a person who is ill is not free to do what she does when she is not ill. All people in their various conditions must act in the knowledge of their limitations. Failure to do this will lead to frustration and eventual disintegration. To act freely, one must act using the power that is currently available through one's nature. The nature of a person who is in chains *includes* this present form of bondage (just as my nature includes not having wings), and so she must draw on other parts of her nature to remain active. Let us suppose that she has been mistakenly arrested. In this situation the knowledge that she is innocent may enable her to not panic, i.e. not lose control of herself, because she can set her mind to thinking of the fact that she will soon be freed (presuming the justice system is in fact just). The same challenge confronts the person who is

sick or dying. Her present activity is restricted in certain ways, and she must adjust her activity accordingly. The question that this brings us to is how, in what ways, and to what extent a person can remain active given these sorts of restrictions that we are considering. How, in other words, can we know ourselves, and that which we interact with, such that our lives can form of an adequate expression of our nature?

For the remainder of this chapter I will outline Spinoza's conceptualisation of the resources that we have available to answer this question, and the question of how a person may maintain wholeness. In the next chapter I will present a general response using the ontological principles that have been introduced; a response that will be qualified by the epistemological limitations that follow from those same principles.

## 5.6 Self reference

As I said, the central principle of Spinoza's ethical doctrine is the negotiation of one's own agency in response to one's complement-in-nature, which comprises an array of multi-lateral self referent agents, some hostile and some 'kindly'. Durational existence is a product of the incongruent agency of conflicting individuals, and this incongruence results from the self-reference of the individuals involved. It is corrected through 'reference to God', i.e. through adequate knowledge of the actuality of the individual not in itself but as it is essentially related to those other agents. In this section I will briefly explain what 'self-reference' consists in and how is it said to emerge in the ontological system I have been describing.

There is I think some familiarity in the idea that life, or at least biological life, is interdependent and inter-determinate. Simply by occupying the space I inhabit I deny that space to others. The existence of one thing suppresses and denies the existence of other things while at the same time enabling the existence of others. These sorts of ideas tend to be in mind when we speak of an 'eco-system', or of the 'cycle of life'. I nourish my body by consuming other organisms, or we could say, other 'bodies': plant, animal, liquid, mineral etc. At the same time my body and my activities nourish and support a range of other 'bodies', including for example the bacterial life in my digestive system, the birds that eat from my fruit trees, our pet cat who I feed twice daily, and the family and friends who I share my life with. However, Spinoza's doctrine of individuality, interdependence, and inter-determination cannot be interpreted simply on the analogy of biological exchange. To begin with, Spinoza applies the principle of interdependency to all existence, not simply biological existence. The interactive mutuality of finite individuals follows from the infinite (yet exhaustive)

determination of God-or-Nature's infinite power. Thus, every thing (every 'mode'), whether physical or psychical, is active and reactive to its complement in nature, and exists in the manner of the potency intrinsic to it as this is affected by its complement. A further, more serious, difficulty is that Spinozistic individuals cannot be straightforwardly equated with the familiar objects of experience (including for example the plants and animals, and other 'bodies' that we identify in a typical ecosystem). Thus, self reference, and the durationality that results from it, cannot be straightforwardly understood through empirical examples, or through empirically derived concepts. How then should these concepts be understood?

In the previous section it was said that an individual is a determinate expression of God-or-Nature; a distinct 'potency-in-act'. Every determination is a unity, a 'microcosm' of the macrocosm, as Hallett puts it. The basic essence of self reference is implicit in this definition: an individual is self referent in that it acts according to its individual nature. Self reference, in other words, is intrinsic in the notion of individuality. However, this in itself does not explain how an individual is distinguished, nor how an individual is constituted, and thus it does not explain the 'self' that self-reference refers to. To address these questions we must consider how we ourselves are epistemically situated in the hierarchy of being, i.e. how our status as finite individuals conditions our knowledge.

In Spinoza's hierarchy of being individuals differ in their reality according to the degree of power that is in them, i.e. according to their ability to sustain themselves as the thing that they are. Within this hierarchy individuals emerge, alter and disintegrate through the 'motions' of interacting 'bodies'.<sup>245</sup> The human body, says Spinoza, 'is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite',<sup>246</sup> and some of these 'highly composite' bodies are 'fluid, some soft, and some hard' (which is to say they have different 'motions', i.e. functions, within the individual that is the body).<sup>247</sup> The 'composite individual' is constituted as an individual by the ability of the individual to exist 'in itself', i.e. by its native power to sustain itself as the thing that it is. In the human body this involves a developmental trajectory that includes socialisation and mastery of certain skills (including linguistic communication) by which the body greatly extends its scope and power of activity.

As stated earlier, mind and body are for Spinoza two attributes of the one substance, and thus a human mind must be understood as the mental agency of the human body: 'the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, *or* a certain mode of extension

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<sup>245</sup> Ethics, PII, axiom 2''.

<sup>246</sup> Ethics, PII, postulate 1.

<sup>247</sup> Ethics, PII, postulate 2.

which actually exists, and nothing else'.<sup>248</sup> *Ideas* are the actuality of the body's thinking agency.

The human mind knows the human body as it is affected by other bodies, and thus all ideas involve 'the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body'.<sup>249</sup> Thus, Spinoza does not equate the perception of a thing with the thing itself, but nor does he regard the perception and the thing as wholly distinct. An 'idea' is the presentation of a modification of substance: the mode that results of the interaction of the knowing body and that which is known. Thus, when I look at, say, a mountain, what I am seeing is not an 'individual' as it exists in God-or-Nature; rather my 'seeing' is the interaction of my body with an aspect of nature, the result of which is the 'idea of a mountain' (though note this is itself a composite, as we can distinguish within this idea a number of simpler ideas, such as the perceptions, i.e. what I see, and the concept 'mountain', and so on). This is not to say that my idea of the mountain is false. In so far as it is understood *as* an affect that results from my body's interaction with another object, it is true. All ideas, in so far as they are referred to God-or-Nature in this way, can be regarded as true. The difficulty of discerning discreet individuals is the difficulty of discerning what is intrinsic to my own body and what is intrinsic to the other, i.e. how much of the idea is me and how much of it is the mountain (so to speak). This is the task or function (i.e. the agency) of the intellect: to make the 'object' intelligible by discerning its nature.

The same epistemic predicament is encountered when we consider our own bodies, and thus our own individuality. The actuality of my body is not to be equated with the object that is conceived through language and perceived through the senses (just as the actuality of the eye cannot be equated with the squishy orb that we can press with our fingers, or perceive in a mirror). A person learns to understand the range of his or her own potency through practical exertion (i.e. through practice), and through the appraisal of that activity by the working of his or her intellect. In this way we discern the self that is referred to in our self-reference: by understanding our place in God-or-Nature, we can understand our 'self' as referred to God. This in turn enables us to act so as to 'escape' durational existence and know an aspect of our reality as it is eternally. Hallett summarises this relationship as follows:

'In the eternal stream of creation the finite individual has being in so far as it holds community with its complement in the infinite Individual; but that being, as individual, provides its own 'frame of reference', and, as finite, operates as a 'screen'

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<sup>248</sup> Ethics, PII, prop. 13.

<sup>249</sup> Ethics, PII, prop. 16.

in relation to which, not only is the individual and eternal complement (as embedding the finite individual) distorted as an ‘other’, divided and temporal, but also impoverished under the category of thinghood, so that is projected as more or less alien (according to the status of the self-referent finite individual), and the individual itself, which exists only by relation with its complement, suffers a congruent degradation and thus relatively self isolated. Its eternity and finite perfection in the integrity of *Natura Naturata* are distorted and clouded, and can only be restored and clarified by a transition from unilateral self-reference to reference to God.<sup>250</sup>

To reiterate, self reference is the ‘natural’ standpoint of any finite individual. The attribute of thought is an attribute of substance, and thus all individuals may be regarded through the attribute of thought (i.e. they all have an intellectual being). By exercising their intellectual power (in so far as they are able) they may transition from self reference to reference to God, and so understand their individuality as it truly is.

The claim that all individuals have an intellectual being will strike many as ludicrous, particularly as it may be taken as attributing thought to objects that are plainly not capable of it. Here it must be remembered that we cannot necessarily say that an object of experience is an individual proper. Individuals are identified through their essential agency, and so we can only discern an individual in so far as I can know that essential agency. For example, though I think of the mountain as an object, what little my intellect tells me of this mountain suggests that it is not actually an individual acting so as to preserve its own particular power. A ‘mountain’ is formed through the consolidation of certain minerals under the pressure of geological forces. If a small chunk is broken away from the mountain there is now a new object, *viz.* a ‘rock’. This rock continues to exist as a consolidated mass of minerals until it is pulverised, dissolved, or otherwise incorporated into another object. The changes it may be subject to depends on the kind of rock it is, and who or what it interacts with: it may be crushed into shingle, sculptured in some elegant way, washed into the ocean and eroded to sand, and so on and so forth.<sup>251</sup> Though it appears through our own self-referent ‘projection’ that the mountain and the rock both come into and pass out of durational being through the

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<sup>250</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 65.

<sup>251</sup> Gillett uses this example in illustrating what he calls ‘narrative metaphysics’. Grant Gillett, *Subjectivity and Being Somebody*, 38. Gillett maintains that the nature of an individual is relative to its narrative context. On the Spinozistic view a narrative as Gillett describes it is an extension of the first and second kinds of knowledge (discussed below) and as such cannot convey the essence of an individual. These views agree somewhat in their treatment of *rational* knowledge; however, Spinoza maintains that we do have knowledge of the essence of individuals through the third kind of knowledge, and in this respect his view goes beyond Gillett’s. A further connection could be drawn with Gillett’s use of Heidegger’s understanding of truth, but I will not attempt to develop this link here.

working of external forces, it does not follow that they are individual beings. On the other hand, this qualification does not wholly free us from the question, as rocks and mountains do involve a particular kind of agency, and so are part of the infinite determination of God-or-Nature, and as such must partake in some kind of individuality. We are required then to conclude that some kind of thought must be present in the being of a rock or a mountain, albeit very limited. What such thought amounts to I cannot say.<sup>252</sup>

As I said at the beginning of the previous section, the account of individuation that I have offered is only partial. It provides the basic conceptual apparatus necessary to understanding Spinoza's ethical theory and his theory of value. This discussion of self-reference is similarly constrained. The key point is that a person's intellect operates through her body (it is the mental operation of her body), and may through the effort of self-emendation (i.e. through the exercise of its intellectual power) pass from self-reference to reference to God-or-Nature, and thereby 'discover its true nature'.<sup>253</sup> With this in mind, we may now turn to the ethical implications of the overall ontological system.

## 5.7 Value and evaluation

Spinoza's conception of value is to be understood through his conception of God-or-Nature: the infinite eternal potency whose essence is to actualise itself in infinite ways. God-or-Nature does not act because of any purpose, but of his own freedom.<sup>254</sup> This free agency is perfect positive being, and in this respect is unequivocally 'good'.<sup>255</sup> However, for finite agents whose agency is constrained in relation to a complement in nature that is perceived as 'other', value is problematic. Finite agents are part of God-or-Nature's agency, and as such their 'good' is to actualise potential (what we value is to enact the power in which we are constituted). However, because their agency is conditioned by the manner in which they are integrated with or alienated from their complement, their being involves evaluation: they hold conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' (where bad cannot be applied to God-or-Nature), and these concepts are relativised to that which helps or hinders their ability to actualise potential. Something is 'good' if it enhances one's agency and 'bad' if it decreases one's agency. This task of evaluation and the corresponding need to adapt oneself to the agency of the other

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<sup>252</sup>Hallett offers the following point of clarification: 'That which is only intelligible *to another*, by reason of a potency extrinsic to itself, cannot be argued to be 'intelligent' ... what Spinoza says is not that all 'bodies' (i.e. pieces of matter), but that all *individual* bodies, are animated, i.e. 'minded' in various degrees (Ethics P II, prop. 13, scholium). Hallett, *Creation, Emanation and Salvation*, 16 note 1.

<sup>253</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 68.

<sup>254</sup> Ethics, PIV, preface.

<sup>255</sup> Ethics, PV, prop. 36.

requires effort, because it involves some degree of self-limitation or moderation of the powers of one's composite body, and thus the being of the individual is degraded from the 'natural' eternal freedom of divinity to durational *conatus*.<sup>256</sup> This is the 'striving' that Spinoza attributes to every being: 'Each thing ... strives to persevere in its being' in that it works to enact its essential agency, where 'persevering' does not mean abiding in a fixed position or static state but remaining active by remaining integrated with the perfect community of God-or-Nature.

On this conception of value, the individual ethical task consists in learning the various ways that one can be active, and how one's energies can be maximally actualised while one is 'moving' within one's complement in nature. The more complex the individual, the more difficult this task is. At the same time, the more complex the individual, the more that is at stake, for more complex individuals have more potential to integrate with their complement, and so greater potential for being.<sup>257</sup> Power of acting depends on integration because agency is always constituted in relation to another (because God-or-Nature is one). Hence, the more one can integrate with another, the more active one can be. This does not need to be an appropriation of power (though in some cases it may be), as proper integration entails mutual respect and thus mutual benefit. To illustrate, let us consider a traditional scale of being: plant, animals, and people (plants being less complex, people being more complex), remembering that our use of examples must always be qualified by our epistemic limitations, in that our knowledge of the agency of any individual is mediated through our interaction with that individual.

From our interaction with a tree we infer that its agency involves growing, flowering, and producing seed. On this basis, 'goodness' for a tree can be regarded in the comparatively straightforward terms of thriving or not thriving, reproducing or not reproducing, 'flourishing' or not flourishing (except of course where we want the tree to grow in certain ways to suit our own purposes, such as according to a particular shape or in such a way as to maximise fruit production; in these cases the integration of our own complex minds with the agency of the tree makes the concept of 'a good tree' more complicated).<sup>258</sup> As another example, let us consider, say, a salmon. The agency of a salmon involves nourishment, growth and reproduction. In these respects a salmon is like a tree. However, a salmon's agency is also

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<sup>256</sup> In this respect the classic psychoanalytic term 'drive' is appropriate as it contains the requisite notion of energy or movement, which is often absent from empirically based conceptions of value.

<sup>257</sup> We must be careful here not to equate agency with sophistication or cleverness. The 'simple' essence consists in maintaining one connection to God-or-Nature, and this connection can be achieved by comparatively unsophisticated beings.

<sup>258</sup> It is interesting that the metaphor of 'flourishing' is so widely used to describe human wellbeing, as in the phrase 'human flourishing'. This perhaps indicates how readily we endorse the 'goodness' of a plant in flower.

very different from a tree, in that it can swim, jump, and respond to its environment in certain limited ways. A salmon can flee from threats and search out and pursue food. Hence, a salmon ‘values’ a different kind of being from a tree, and finds different things to be good and bad.<sup>259</sup>

The potentiality of a person is far greater, and far more complicated, than that of plants and fish. The human body, as noted earlier, is a ‘highly composite individual’ composed of individuals that are themselves highly composite. As such, the human body is capable of being ‘affected’ in many ways, which means it is capable of a wide array of activities, and of perceiving and adapting much more to the activity of God-or-Nature. This is both the plight and the promise of a human life: much is possible and hence much may be lost, or never attained. However, this does not seem to us a problem so long as we are active; it is only where agency is frustrated that we begin to question our being, i.e. to question who we are and our place in nature, and hence to question what is good. Thus, from the Spinozistic perspective, the starting point of ethics can be defined as the moment of resistance.<sup>260</sup>

Examples of activities that are ‘good’ for a person are easy enough to find. We only need to consider which activities do not ordinarily call for ethical reflection. The caution is that we cannot straightforwardly regard these examples as goods-in-themselves (or ends-in-themselves) because they are only good when actualised appropriately, where propriety is always referred to the current condition of the agent (remembering that goodness for a finite agent is always relative to the particular agent). So, eating, conversing, walking, cycling, reading, listening, singing, dancing, reflecting, investigating, contemplating, sleeping, playing, joking, laughing, gardening, tramping, performing, crafting, painting, planning, organising, calculating, holding, ... etc are all activities that a human being can undertake and regard as ‘good in themselves’. They are good in so far as they are actualised appropriately (it is generally recognised, for instance, that there are times when it is wrong to laugh, to talk, that it is possible to play too much sport, to think too much, and so on and so forth). In so far as these activities are actualised appropriately (i.e. under an adequate understanding of those other agents who are complementary to one’s being), they do not need to be justified, i.e. do not need ethical reflection. However, as every activity is connected in the essential integrity

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<sup>259</sup> My treatment of these examples will be familiar to Aristotelians. Spinoza’s view of value overlaps with the Aristotelian view on certain key points, though it is supported by a rather different metaphysic and epistemology. Here is not the place for a comprehensive comparison. One difference is that Spinoza rejects the idea of ontological ‘kinds’, so on his view there is no such thing as ‘human’ functioning as such. I will explain this shortly.

<sup>260</sup> On this same point Spinoza’s position corresponds with Korsgaard’s, who argued that normativity is a product of reflective dissonance.

of the agent, any activity may be subject to ethical reflection; a problem in one aspect of one's life may disrupt or call into question many others.

Distinguishing when it is and is not appropriate to act in certain ways is simply another way of describe our evaluative judgments, which – as discussed in previous chapters – is something that all human beings are taught, and which we continue to develop through exercising our individual intellect. Such judgements are, as I have said, basic to the agency of any finite individual, to the extent that its intellect supplies an understanding capable of such judgments. However, Spinoza's ontology offers a much more substantial account of the nature of value, and an account of judgment that goes beyond the notion of an individual 'will' rationally deliberating in the service of certain desires (as it is for Kant), or in accordance with a 'self-conception' that has been assembled of previous judgments (as in Korsgaard). In Spinoza's view, judgment is the embodied individual attempting to sustain herself through more-or-less adequate knowledge of her present condition in relation to others. This knowledge is not limited to our rational understanding, but includes feelings – or affects – which are part of the overall composition of the individual, and either help or hinder the self-actualisation of the agent, according to how they relate to her overall activity. In the next two sections I will outline how these forms of knowledge are distinguished, and how they operate in relation to our ethical task.

## 5.8 Ideas, feelings, and unity

The individual human mind is first constituted in the idea of the 'singular thing which actually exists'.<sup>261</sup> This idea arises in conjunction with the singularity of the 'actual body' to which the mind is united,<sup>262</sup> and becomes aware of its own agency as it is expressed in and affected by its complement in nature.<sup>263</sup> All ideas are affects, and involve a certain kind of feeling (they are 'affective'). An idea contributes to an agent's activity according to the kind of feeling that it involves. Some ideas increase the agent's power of acting, while others decrease it. Ideas also differ in relation to the self. An idea that is internal to the agent enables self-efficacy (i.e. freedom or autonomy), whereas an idea that is external to the agent act upon the agent, and so are described as 'passions'.

Our basic drive, which Spinoza describes as 'appetite', is to maintain and increase our power of acting by increasing those ideas that are more effective, and reducing those that are

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<sup>261</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 11. This point corresponds with Kant's notion of the unity of apperception, though note that it is has been arrived at via very different route.

<sup>262</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 7.

<sup>263</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 3.

passive. When ‘appetite’ is considered only as an idea it is called ‘will’, and when it is accompanied by an adequate idea of itself (i.e. ‘consciousness of an appetite’) it is called ‘desire’.<sup>264</sup> For example, hunger is an appetite that arises in our bodies, and it moves us to locate and consume food. If I considered my hunger simply in terms of my mind, I might say ‘I want food’, and this would be regarded as an expression of my will. However, even though the body is not mentioned in this idea (‘I want food’), it is nevertheless active in parallel with the mental activity. All expressions of will (all ideas) have a bodily aspect, because our minds are united to our bodies (‘mind is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the affectations of the body’). In the case of hunger this correspondence is generally evident, in that one can readily associate one’s desire for food with one’s bodily activity. However, the human mind involves both ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate’ ideas, which means that we can be more or less ‘conscious’ of the nature of our appetites. Infants, for example, have only very limited knowledge of their appetites: very basic ideas (we might say urges) that move them toward food (and to cry if they do not have it), and that move them to react to certain perceptions (e.g. they tend to suck on anything that comes into contact with their mouths). Properly speaking, the infant does not even know that it wants food, for all it ‘knows’ is a certain pain or distress and a certain pleasure that is addressed and actualised through the operation of its nose and mouth. By contrast, most adults have an idea of what particular food they want and how they may go about getting it. This distinction may be applied to the many various appetites that arise in the human body, of which we may be more or less conscious.

The kind of feeling that is involved in a given idea is determined by how that idea relates to the power of the unified mind, which is ‘striving to persevere in its being’.<sup>265</sup> The idea of being itself, i.e. the idea of oneself as the effective and free cause of one’s actions, is a particular kind of enjoyment. Spinoza describes this as ‘the intellectual love of God’, or ‘blessedness’, for it is the feeling that God has wholly and eternally as the only wholly free agent.<sup>266</sup> All other feelings Spinoza describes as ‘affects’, and as ‘affects’ they are brought about by our interaction with other agents, and so are associated with the presence or absence of those other agents. He identifies three ‘primary’ affects: desire (which has already been described), joy, and sadness. Joy is felt when we perceive our power to be increasing, while

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<sup>264</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 9.

<sup>265</sup> Ethics, P III, prop 12.

<sup>266</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 36. On this point Spinoza’s metaphysics is in agreement with Kant’s: ‘Freedom itself thus becomes in this indirect way capable of being enjoyed. This cannot be called happiness, since it does not depend upon a positive participation of feeling; nor can it be called bliss, because it does not include complete independence from inclinations and desires. It does nevertheless resemble the latter so far at least as the determination of the will which it involves can be held to be free from their influence, and thus, at least in its origin, it is analogous to the self-sufficiency which can be ascribed only to the Supreme Being.’ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 125.

sadness is felt when we perceive our power to be decreasing.<sup>267</sup> The primary affects come in many different forms, varying according to the kind of change that is occurring in the mind. For example, Spinoza defines ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ as affects of joy and sadness ascribed to particularly parts of the body, and ‘cheerfulness’ and ‘melancholy’ are affects ascribed to the body as a whole.<sup>268</sup> Two further categories of affect arise as we associate our affects with other agents, *viz.* love and hate. ‘Love’ is joy associated with something that increases power of acting, while ‘hate’ is sadness associated with something that decreases our power of acting.<sup>269</sup> As our basic desire is to maintain and increase our power of acting, we are naturally given to protect and increase those things we love, and avoid or destroy those things we hate. It is of course possible for us to love and hate a thing simultaneously, because as composite beings our parts can be affected in contrasting ways, and hence the same thing can cause both joy and sadness. Equally, it is possible to actualise certain parts of the body to the determinant of others.

From the perspective of the individual, the ethical task is to integrate the diverse powers of the body so as to maintain and maximise one’s power of acting.<sup>270</sup> This requires bringing the ‘self-referent’ individual parts under the coordinate governance of the ‘self’ in which the parts are together, and through which they are not simply ‘together’ but unified. This is the condition of the finite composite individual, whose power is limited, and who has within her self an array of only more-or-less compatible potencies. There is within any individual the potential for preservation and also emendation through congruence with the complement in nature, or degradation leading to destruction through uni-lateral self-reference of the parts over and against the greater whole (which is ultimately God-or-Nature). This is the Spinozistic equivalent of what Korsgaard described as ‘self constitution’, or the task of ‘pulling oneself together’; the task of ‘the person’.

The key differences between Spinoza’s and Korsgaard’s different models of agency are in their views on the relationship between reasons and feelings, and on the structure of the self that is reflecting on its condition. Korsgaard’s model of agency follows the classic Kantian approach in presenting rational reflection as a ‘free’ process independent of feelings. A feeling may constitute a reason, but I am free to decide whether or not to endorse that feeling (on the basis of my ‘reasoning’). An action is mine if it is grounded on a reason that I

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<sup>267</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 11.

<sup>268</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 11.

<sup>269</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 13.

<sup>270</sup> In chapter four of *The Ethics* Spinoza describes a list of various possible conditions of the human individual, and their relative merits in reference to the overall goal (e.g. indulgence, deceit, anger, temperance, humility, self-respect, etc).

have endorsed (and if I act on a reason that I have not endorsed then I fail to act as a free agent). For Spinoza the ‘idea’ that is ‘the reason’ is a feeling, and so too is the idea of the idea. The quality of these feelings is related to the quality of my actions. Free action is not defined by whether or not I ‘think’ myself to be free, or on whether my reason coheres with my self-understanding (practical identity), but the nature of the causal forces operative in (or upon) my unified body, i.e. whether or not *I* am actualising my potential. Reasons and self-understanding are important because they have a significant role in enabling us to actualise potential (they constitute a certain kind of knowledge through which we can act). However, an action does not equate to a reason, and a self does not equate to a self-understanding; and – moreover – some reasons are better than others, and some self-understandings a more accurate than others. To make sense these distinctions we must understand Spinoza’s account of knowledge. This is what I will discuss in the next section.

## 5.9 Knowledge and action

I have said little in this chapter regarding Spinoza’s epistemic doctrine, and this is because my focus is on those aspects of his system that are most directly relevant to his account of wholeness and value. However, it is impossible to properly understand this account without giving some consideration to his account of knowledge, because the power of a mind – and hence the value achieved – is determined by the quality of its thoughts.

For Spinoza, all ideas are actions, for everything that exists is an action. However, he also sees ideas as differing in power (some are more effective than others), and the most basic distinction he draws here is between ideas that are ‘adequate’ and ideas that are ‘inadequate’. An adequate idea is an idea that generates of its own ‘potency’ that which it is an idea of.<sup>271</sup> Spinoza offers as an example the idea of a sphere as generated by rotating a semicircle about a fixed point.<sup>272</sup> Thinking of a semicircle in this way produces a sphere, and hence the idea is an adequate idea of a sphere. An inadequate idea, by contrast, is an idea that does not have sufficient power in itself to generate that which is produced, i.e. to ensure that its logical form is such that it actually is what we take it to be. So, if I conceive a sphere simply in terms of a three dimensional circle (or if I imagine a circle that is shaded to appear as a sphere), then my idea is inadequate in that it will not in itself generate a geometrically accurate sphere (though it may be adequate for generating an imprecise pictorial representation of a sphere). An

<sup>271</sup>An adequate idea is defined as ‘an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea’. Ethics, PII, definition 4. See also Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 61.

<sup>272</sup>Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendation*, section 72.

adequate idea is a true idea, though this does not mean that inadequate ideas are necessarily false. The distinction is that adequate ideas are intrinsically true whereas inadequate ideas can only be extrinsically true, i.e. they require external potency (further ideas) in order to become true. It is possible that I could sketch a perfect circle, or perfectly estimate that shape of a sphere, and hypothetically this could be factually true, but I could not claim to *know* that this is true, because my idea is not adequate. To know that the circle I have drawn is a perfect circle I need to extend my intellect in such a way as to make an adequate idea (e.g. I could apply a compass).

Inadequate ideas arise from our self-referent perspective, i.e. they are formed confusedly from our limited and conditioned ‘position’ in God-or-Nature. To use another of Spinoza’s examples, I may judge from the appearance of the sun that it is several kilometres from earth. This idea is inadequate because it is based on a perceptual system which is not ‘powerful’ enough to comprehend the agencies involved (i.e. the sun in relation to the earth). By extending one’s intellect in various ways (e.g. by mathematical calculation, optical technology, and such like) one can come to ‘know’ that the sun is an average of 150 million kilometres from earth (or ‘more than 600 diameters of the earth’ as Spinoza reckoned it), though even still these ideas are qualified, e.g., by the premises involved or the precision of the equipment, and as such remain inadequate.<sup>273</sup> However, this is not to say that the knowledge is incorrect, for inadequate ideas are not wholly false, and when understood according to their relative power they become adequate. It is, for instance, true that the sun ‘looks to me’ to be about several hundred kilometres from earth, and so long as I affirm no more than that, then my idea is adequate (i.e. I have adequate knowledge of ‘how the sun looks to me’). To recognise this limitation is to refer this knowledge ‘to God’; it is to *emend* one’s ‘intellect’ via an adequate grasp on one’s relation to the whole. Moreover, whether emended or not, such ‘limited’ knowledge is nevertheless effective in many ways. For instance, by this knowledge I know that the sun is not a mere 100 metres away, and feel confident that it is not ‘just over the hill’ (though I may feel I need to ‘check’ this by walking to the top of said hill).

Having defined true ideas as adequate ideas, the next question to consider is where ideas come from, and in particular how adequate ideas are acquired. Spinoza distinguishes three kind of ‘knowledge’, i.e. ways in which ideas are generated. The first he calls ‘*imaginatio*’ or ‘opinion’. These are ideas that are generated through the processes of sense perception, and those that we derive from ‘vagrant experience’, without an understanding of

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<sup>273</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 35, scholium.

their actual generative power. Many of the ideas we have of other agents fall into the category of *imaginatio* because they arise through sensory processes (e.g. how they look, smell, sound etc), and as such are ‘images’ that are ‘affects’ of our interaction (indeed Spinoza says that ‘the ideas we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies’).<sup>274</sup> Another example is ‘facts’ that are derived from authority or technique. I can, for instance, enter a complex equation into a calculator and read the result, and in this way I will have an ‘idea’ of the correct answer. However, if I do not know *why* or *how* the answer is correct then my knowledge falls into the category of *imaginatio*.

The second kind of knowledge Spinoza describes as ‘*ratio*’ or ‘intellection’. These ideas result from the power of mind to apprehend the properties that are common to individuals. As such, they are not ideas of any particular individual,<sup>275</sup> but ‘rational entities’ (*entia rationis*), i.e. ideas that are generated by the activity of the mind.<sup>276</sup> To think of a dog as a barking animal, or as having four legs, or fur etc, is to think with this kind of idea. Such ideas are formed from the power of the mind to see individual dogs as in certain respects the same, and that one of the properties they commonly exhibit is, say, barking. Reasons, as I have discussed them in relation to Korsgaard’s theory, fall into the category the second kind of knowledge. They are rules by which we discern properties common to groups of actions.

All individuals share properties with others, because – as has been discussed – all individuals are united in God-or-Nature. However, all individuals are also unique. So, *ratio* is not knowledge of ‘abstract universals’, but simply recognition of what particular individuals share. It is not knowledge *of* an existent ‘property’, e.g. the properties ‘dog’ or ‘barking’, that subsists independently of my idea. Hence, a *ratio* idea only allows me to draw conclusions in relation to individuals that I have knowledge of. Properly speaking, I cannot say that ‘all dogs bark’, because I do not have knowledge of all dogs; indeed, there is no such *thing* as ‘all dogs’, as the idea ‘dog’ is merely a term for grouping individuals that I have noted as sharing certain properties.<sup>277</sup>

Arguably, one could find discussion of the distinction between the first and the second kinds of knowledge and in other epistemological theories (here I am thinking particularly of Kantian epistemology). It is Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge that is most exceptional, and also most essential, to his overall theory. This kind of knowledge he calls ‘intuitive

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<sup>274</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 16, corollary 2.

<sup>275</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 37.

<sup>276</sup> Which is not to say of course that they are purely mental entities; all mental activities have their physical correlate.

<sup>277</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 40.

knowledge', or '*scientia intuitiva*'. This is adequate knowledge of the 'essence of things', i.e. the intrinsic agency of the individual.<sup>278</sup> To know an idea in this way is to share in the generative power of that which is known. All knowledge involves this kind of knowledge in some degree, for all ideas are acts of the mind, and all actions involve intuitive knowledge of the body, and always incorporate another agent or agents.<sup>279</sup> Controlling one's body involves intuitive knowledge, as does using a language, mastering arithmetic, using tools, driving a vehicle, playing an instrument, following an argument, and so on and so forth. In these actions we integrate our agency with some aspect of our complement in nature, and so come to enjoy the being of the other. To learn to act in these ways is to improve ones power of acting through engagement with the other as individual agent, such that the respective powers of oneself and the other become cooperative, as compared with simply thinking rationally *about* a person as a certain kind of thing (i.e. by *ratio*):

'By *Ratio* we have knowledge of Peter *qua* 'man', but not of Peter *qua* Peter. The inferences of *Ratio*, therefore, though certain, are truncated by reason of their generality, and no individual essence can by their means be concluded. Or rather, perhaps we should say, between what is true of Peter *qua* man, and the true essence of Peter, there remains a gap only capable of being filled by an infinity of such inferences. But knowledge *par excellence* is of the real, i.e. of the individual.'<sup>280</sup>

'I have *adequate* knowledge of the existence of Peter in so far only as the imaginational 'evidence' of his presence is emended to the form of co-dependence on a common cause or potency, so that Peter and I are in perfect community – and this is partly achieved in love, in sodality, and even in debate.'<sup>281</sup>

*Scientia intuitiva* is central to Spinoza's ethical doctrine because it is in this kind of knowledge that we 'feel and enjoy' the agency of the other,<sup>282</sup> and in the increase of this knowledge (and with the aid of the second and third kinds of knowledge, according to their respective potencies) that we move to a 'greater perfection'. As I mentioned earlier, Spinoza describes this knowledge as 'the intellectual love of God',<sup>283</sup> as for him the essence of love is

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<sup>278</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 40, scholium 2 IV.

<sup>279</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 76-7.

<sup>280</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 80.

<sup>281</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 80. Footnote 3.

<sup>282</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 76.

<sup>283</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 33.

the community of individuals together actualising the ‘primordial’ potency of God-or-Nature. He also described it as ‘blessedness’, i.e. ‘the tranquillity of mind which springs from the intuitive knowledge of the God’,<sup>284</sup> and ‘the mind endowed with perfection itself’.<sup>285</sup> This ‘perfection’ consists in the harmonious relation of the self to the other, and so it is not constrained by the degree of power available. The possibility of ‘greater perfection’ consists in the possibility of the growth of the self by greater integration with the other. The ethical task is to move toward blessedness, and where possible to grow, and this is achieved by gaining a true understanding of oneself as a whole within the greater whole that is God-or-Nature,<sup>286</sup> i.e. moving from ‘self reference’ to ‘reference to God’.

### 5.10 The self as constituted in the other, eternally

I have discussed how individuals are particular determinations of God-or-Nature, and how the determination of God-or-Nature (the composition of individuals) comprises an infinite hierarchy of mutual determination through the interaction of those individuals. This results in a graded reality, whereby the infinite parts (the infinite individuals) differ in existence according to the degree to which they are integrated with other parts in the hierarchy. Integration here is understood as cooperative agency, such that the parts are unified so as to actualise a congruent whole.

On the account of individuation just summarised, an individual exists in relation to an ‘other’, broadly conceived as her ‘complement in nature’, and achieves selfhood by integration with that other. Given that all existence is cooperative in this way, it follows that all individuals are composed of other individuals, and are therefore dependent on their connection to these others for their existence. A being wholly isolated would have no power of acting and so not exist.<sup>287</sup> Thus, all individuals are in fact composite, and their power of acting depends on their ability to integrate the parts of which they are composed. The more that they are able to do this, the more real – the more ‘themselves’ – they become.

This idea that the self is ontologically constituted in the other provides an explanation of the moral imperative that is not available to philosophies that are grounded on the Cartesian conception of the self. At the beginning of this chapter I revisited that Cartesian foundation of

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<sup>284</sup> Ethics, P IV, appendix 4.

<sup>285</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 33. See also Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 78.

<sup>286</sup> Hallett conceives an individual unity as a microcosm within the macrocosm. See Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 34-40.

<sup>287</sup> For a discussion of the ontological status of ‘singular entities’ (‘*corpora simplicissima*’) see Excursus IV of Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 138-141.

the Kantian philosophy, whereby the account of the self begins with phenomena of thought and experience, and infers its connection to ‘reality’ through transcendental analysis of those phenomena. Constructed this way, the self is conceived as fundamentally distinct from its ‘other’, and as such the imperative to act in the interests of the other inherently problematic. This distinction is reflected in the idea that ‘moral interests’ must be distinct from personal interests, even if we should prefer them to agree; a distinction that has long been considered a cornerstone of moral thinking.<sup>288</sup> Korsgaard, as we saw, argued that this gap is bridged by the publicity of reasons. She argued that our ability to exchange reasons enables us to ‘obligate’ one another. On Spinozistic analysis, the individual is unique, and yet only exists as a unique individual through its connection to others. So I cannot truly separate my own interests from the interests of others. Thus, the moral imperative to act in the ‘interests’ of another is also ‘self-interested’, for by empowering another I am also empowering myself.<sup>289</sup> This point shall be further developed in the next chapter.

A more surprising, and perhaps more significant, implication of Spinoza’s conception of the self is that it suggests that the self as referred to God is eternal. Spinoza draws this striking inference in part five of the *Ethics*, where he says that ‘the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal’, and – yet more remarkably – that ‘we feel and know by experience that we are eternal’.<sup>290</sup> This is an aspect of the *Ethics* that has caused much consternation and difficulty for commentators, particularly as it appears to directly contradict the substantial identity of the mind and body that has been so rigorously argued for in the previous four parts.<sup>291</sup> As Hallett explains, the idea makes sense so long as we remain clear on the distinction between eternal and durational existence. Eternal being is the perfect, unhindered actualisation of potential. It is the being of God-or-Nature. Durational being is potential only imperfectly and or partially actualised. This is the being of finite self-referent individuals. However, finite self-referent beings do not exist independently of God-or-Nature, for that would mean they were of a different substance, which has been shown to be impossible. Individuals exist in God-or-Nature, which means that the agency they enjoy is part of the agency of God-or-Nature. In this respect, their agency is eternal. The individual has knowledge of her eternal existence in so far as she has

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<sup>288</sup> The separation of virtue and happiness (i.e. personal happiness) is one point on which classic Kantianism and classic Utilitarianism seem to agree (and both also acknowledge the need to show that virtue brings a kind of good to the virtuous person). I have explored this tension in Kant’s theory in Chapter two. For the Utilitarian perspective (or one expression of it), see Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 22 (Mill argues that a person acting virtuously at the cost of her personal happiness must still regard virtue as an ‘end ‘which is good’).

<sup>289</sup> Paul Wienpahl makes this point in *The Radical Spinoza*, though I do not think he sufficiently articulates how the individual remains an individual while identifying with the whole.

<sup>290</sup> *Ethics*, P V, prop. 23.

<sup>291</sup> See Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 15-6 (and chapter 10 for an extended discussion).

knowledge of God-or-Nature (according to the third kind of knowledge), and hence she ‘feels and knows by experience’ that she is eternal.<sup>292</sup> As this knowledge belongs to the attribute of thought and not extension, it is the ‘mind’ and not the body that is eternal.<sup>293</sup>

How, and to what extent, this conception of human eternity is of any consolation or use to us is another question, which I will pursue in the following chapter. There I shall restate and develop the Spinozistic conception of wholeness, and apply it to the questions I have considered in the previous chapters. What I have provided in this chapter is the basic conceptual framework necessary for understanding these ideas. I will close this chapter by comparing Spinoza’s conception of wholeness directly with Korsgaard’s, so as to clarify the distinctiveness of Spinoza’s position.

### 5.11 Comparing Spinoza and Korsgaard on the nature of wholeness

In the neo-Kantian ontology a person is primarily a rationally self-reflective agent. From this starting point we arrived at the idea that a person is whole when her actions are consistent with the reasons that follow from her sense of what makes her life worth living. On this conception, forming one’s life as a whole requires first that one has principles that provide one with a sense of worth (i.e. principles that are personally ‘meaningful’), second that these principles are more-or-less ‘liveable’ (i.e. that they fit with ‘reality’ in some sort of way), and third that one has the ‘will power’ required to act in accordance with those principles.

In Spinoza’s ontology, a person is a determination of infinite eternal agency interacting with an infinite variety of other such ‘determinations’ (individuals), i.e. an agent whose agency is essentially related to other agents. On this view, a person forms her life as a whole as she increases her knowledge of herself, and is free to express her nature accordingly. Such freedom requires that she is rightly related to her ‘complement in nature’, which is grounded on adequate knowledge of herself and those other agents with which she is interacting.

In both accounts, ‘being’ (in Spinoza) or ‘life’ (in Korsgaard) is regarded as an end-in-itself.<sup>294</sup> Also, in both accounts being or life is conceived in terms of agency. That means that both define the person as an agent. Consequently, they also agree in defining the constitution of the agent and the resulting efficacy of the agent’s agency as ‘good’ (in that the efficacious person is more active and hence more ‘alive’, or more ‘real’). Thus, both agree

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<sup>292</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 33.

<sup>293</sup> See Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 53. For an extended discussion see Hallett, *Aeternitas*, chapter IV.

<sup>294</sup> Korsgaard describes value as ‘the fact of life’. It is, she says, the ‘natural condition of living things to be valuers, and that is why values exists’. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 161.

that freedom is the ultimate end of morality, and that freedom means being free to act according to one's nature. Correspondingly, both view moral failure as a failure of agency. Where they fundamentally differ is in their analysis of how the nature of a person is determined and known.

For Korsgaard, a person's nature is expressed in her acts of reflective endorsement (i.e. our evaluative judgments), and these are always mediated through reasons. In her view, we express, record and integrate our evaluative judgments through a rational description; a description that she refers to as a 'practical identity'. Thus, our nature is understood in terms of a dialectic of rational action and rational reflection (or self description), and autonomy (or self constitution) as being indicated when these two are in agreement. Achieving this kind of agreement requires ethical work, which involve both strength of will and rational insight, such that one can form a practical identity that provides a sense of value which is sustainable over the course of life.

For Spinoza, a person's nature is formed not through self description but through interaction with others. We exist as an 'affectation' of multiple different interacting agencies, which is altered according to how it affects and is affected in its interactions. This model does not exclude rational reflection; rather rational reflection is viewed as the means by which the individual can direct its agency. All individuals are driven to sustain or increase their power of acting. They do this through knowledge of the other agents with which they are interacting. Such knowledge is what allows them to align their agency with the agency of others, which is what enables them to sustain or increase in their power of acting. Thus, rationally considered action, and rational reflection, are necessary for a person to sustain or increase in his or her power of acting. Superficially, this position appears very similar to Korsgaard's, in that they both link a person's agency with her reasoning. However, behind this initial agreement there are several important differences.

Korsgaard presents rational reflection and the 'rational' decisions that a person consequently makes (she described these decisions as 'reflective endorsement') as instances of 'self determination'. A person is who she is because of her choices, and these choices are 'self legislated'. They are governed by a 'practical identity' which is accrued through a procession of such choices. Thus, a person is formed as she evaluates, chooses, re-evaluates, chooses again, evaluates again, and so on in an endless cycles until the person either achieves 'reflective equilibrium' or dies. On this view, a person's decision is 'free' and 'good' so long as it is consistent with her practical identity. Thus, Korsgaard concludes that choices are only necessarily constrained - and hence 'morally' constrained - by those aspects of a practical

identity that are necessary to having a practical identity (*viz.* the fact that we are ‘rational beings’; and then whatever is thought to follow from this). I am free to ‘be myself’, which means I am free to be who I choose to be, so long as this does not contradict what is necessarily true of my identity. Likewise, I am free to enjoy whatever it is that I positively evaluate (what seems ‘good to me’), so long as these goods are not contrary to the supreme good that is my ‘humanity’. Spinoza’s model of rational decision differs in several important respects.

Fundamentally, Spinoza does not regard rational reflections as ontologically distinct from other parts of the person. A person does not ‘stand apart’ from her thoughts, feelings, or situation and generate an evaluation that is then introduced or applied to those thoughts, feelings or situations. Rational reflection is the act of the mind seeking to make an object intelligible (either through comparison with other objects, and so according to the second kind of knowledge, or through its own nature, and so according to the third kind of knowledge), in order than one may know how to act in relation to it. As such, it is not a separate act of the mind over the body, but is the body more or less effective in actualising potential.<sup>295</sup> On this model, the freedom (and goodness) of a decision is not relative to a person’s ‘practical identity’, but consists in the degree to which it constitutes the agent as an effective unity – actualises her potential – which in turn consists in the degree to which the decision is based on an adequate understanding of those others with whom the agent is interacting.

In Spinoza’s analysis, a ‘practical identity’ – the self-conception by which we understand our place in the world and what makes our life worth living – and the reasons that follow from it, belong to the second kind of knowledge. This kind of knowledge shows the properties that are common to different individuals. It includes all forms of philosophy (including Spinoza’s), much of what is described as scientific knowledge (though such knowledge is often misapplied due to a failure to recognise its imaginational root), ethical codes and social mores (including the moral propositions contained in part four of Spinoza’s ethics),<sup>296</sup> and indeed any general rule under which we group a set of particulars (and in that respect language itself, though while all meaningful utterance involves a rule, it is not the case that all utterances are for making things intelligible). The value of such knowledge is that it enables us to adapt ourselves so that we are able to interact with other individuals in ways that

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<sup>295</sup> The problem with Frankl’s claim that a person is free, whatever her circumstances, to make ‘a meaningful response’ to those circumstances, is that it relies on the Kantian notion of radical freedom, which I am rejecting in favour of the Spinozistic alternative. I will discuss this point further in the next two chapters.

<sup>296</sup> ‘...the ethical doctrine of Spinoza is formally elaborated under the ‘second kind of knowledge’, *Ratio*, and thus considers the moral predicament of the *commune* ‘man’ rather than that of this or that man – the application of the resulting principles being left, but for examples, to the good sense of the reader. Hallett *Creation, Emanation and Salvation*, 203.

increase intuitive knowledge, which is value itself. Without the second kind of knowledge we could not form purposes, or in any way coordinate our actions. It would be as if every action was wholly novel. Adequate knowledge of the nature of other individual begins as *ratio* and transitions to *scientia intuitiva* with the congruent actualisation of potential. The exception of course is knowledge of oneself, which is originally intuitive and is then extended via *ratio*, such that the self becomes more integrated with the other, and thus the scope of enjoyment, i.e. intuitive knowledge, is increased. Thus, reasons and self descriptions are very important, because they facilitate our ability to understand ‘ourselves’. In showing how our actions and interactions are the same they increase our capacity for free action. However, they do not in themselves constitute freedom. This depends on the quality of the thoughts involved. There are good and bad reasons, and good and bad descriptions, and the distinction lies in whether or not they are grounded on adequate or inadequate knowledge. Being free is not about ‘being true’ to one’s self-conception (the principles that one is committed to), it is about true knowledge, i.e. self-efficacious knowledge of the nature of things.

I will illustrate the distinction between the two models with a simple example. I like beer; this is a description of me. Following Korsgaard, we would say that this is part of my practical identity, which means that it is based on my positive evaluation of the experience of drinking beer (or perhaps more precisely, my reflection of the feeling or ‘pleasure’ that the drinking produces; what exactly I am reflecting on could be construed in a variety of ways), and that this rational reflection gives me a *prima facie* reason to drink beer when it is available. Now, while Korsgaard accepts that there is a feeling of pleasure that prompts us to form a reason, it is not until I reflect on this pleasure that I can be properly said to value drinking beer. On her model, the bedrock of value is my reflective act: my rational assessment of whether I do or do I not like beer. On the Spinozistic analysis, my liking beer is constituted in the feeling of pleasure. Drinking beer – whatever else may result – embodies a species of joy (and hence value), though this enjoyment may or may not be initiated by adequate knowledge and hence result from my own power (or ‘virtue’). Subsequent reflection on this act is a separate intellectual activity that offers a different, and potentially greater, species of joy: it opens the possibility of my integrating this ‘part’ of my body (the part that is enjoying the drink) with other parts of my body (e.g. the parts that need to concentrate on writing or on walking in a straight line). Because ‘my mind does not involve adequate knowledge of the parts composing my body’, understanding the relationship between the parts of my body is something that I must work to achieve.<sup>297</sup> I need to think

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<sup>297</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 29.

about how the parts affect each others in order to maintain ‘the same proportion of motion and rest’ such that the ‘form of the body’ is preserved.<sup>298</sup> If this can be achieved, I will be ‘cheerful’ or ‘happy’.<sup>299</sup>

The key difference between the two models is that Spinoza’s offers a much richer conception of what it is that ‘governs’ our evaluations. Value, on his view, is not something that results from our evaluation; it is the power of acting, which is constituted in the affectations of interacting bodies. Thus, while ‘goodness’ is that which is construed as good for me, and beings like me, it is not determined by my ‘preferences’. I might think that beer is good for me, and be wrong about this. To know that something is ‘truly’ good for me requires ‘adequate knowledge’ of how it affects me. For Spinoza acting in ‘accordance with reason’ is virtue: the power of the mind to exercise adequate knowledge.<sup>300</sup> Thus, reflective endorsement only establishes my freedom if I have given adequate thought to my action: if I am in command of what I am doing. It may be that I do not perceive the ways that beer does not agree with me, and hence there is scope in Spinoza’s analysis for another person to instruct me as to what is good for me.

In the final part of chapter three I suggested that the best way of interpreting Korsgaard’s theory is to disregard her formal conception of ‘humanity’, and to focus instead on her ‘private reasons argument’, in which she discusses how we obligate one another through the ‘exchange of reasons’. In chapter four I discussed how the public nature of reasons implies that other people may assess and criticise an individual’s reasoning through reference to publicly accessible criteria of reasonability. This is a move toward the Spinozistic model, though the extent to which it corresponds with the Spinozistic account depends on how we account for reasonability. In Spinoza’s account, reasonability is a matter of adequate knowledge, i.e. the efficacy and integrity of thought. It cannot be simply the sharing of preferences, as Korsgaard may be interpreted as suggesting. If, on the other hand, reasonability is regarded as more substantially constrained by our relations to the ‘form of life’ in which meanings are formed, then Korsgaard’s view is like Spinoza’s, for under this conception on-going rational reflection would lead to sustained rational integrity and reflective equilibrium which would indicate an increased power to be oneself, i.e. power of the mind, which is the goal of Spinozistic ethics.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Ethics, P IV, prop. 39.

<sup>299</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 11. See also P IV, prop. 44 in which Spinoza notes that ‘cheerfulness ... is more easily conceived than observed’.

<sup>300</sup> ‘The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone’. Ethics, P III, prop. 3.

<sup>301</sup> I believe that such a conception of meaning and reasonability can be discerned in Wittgenstein’s writing, but I will not develop this point here.

One further note is perhaps necessary here to clarify the status of ‘wrongdoing’ and obligation in Spinoza’s system, and how this compares with the account made available through Korsgaard’s system. This is not the place for an extensive treatment of this issue, but it needs to be mentioned as it is relevant to the question of wholeness with which we are concerned. In Korsgaard’s system a person is morally restrained by her awareness of certain reasons. The slave holder, with his albeit dim and perhaps unacknowledged awareness of the ‘humanity’ of his slaves is open to rational (and hence moral) criticism, and this will produce guilt, which may in turn provoke him to change. Spinoza’s view is similar, in that he maintains that a person does wrong when she ‘chooses the worse though knowing the better’.<sup>302</sup> In other words, the act is ‘wrong’ because it involves a failure to act in accordance with one’s nature. This requires, of course, showing how, for example, it is ‘better’ for the slaveholder to acknowledge the ‘humanity’ of his slaves, and to release them. There are at least two aspects to this argument. The first aspect refers to what may be termed the ‘material’ condition of the slaveholder. Materially speaking, he would be worse off if he freed his slaves, certainly in the short term. To argue otherwise one has to address the slaveholder’s understanding of his social and political nature. Morality, on the Spinozistic account, requires some kind of ‘social order’. Human beings are individually very weak, and their lives are much better when joined with others who share their nature.<sup>303</sup> It is worse for the slaveholder to live in a world in which slavery is practiced, even though he is presently the beneficiary of the practice, because it pits certain groups of society against each other. His slaves will, as is their ‘natural’ right, seek to emancipate themselves, and resist the oppression by whatever means they have. He will have to exert effort toward suppressing them which will weaken him. Any society that attributes unequal status to members that are in fact of the same nature will be rationally unsustainable, and the natural tendency towards cooperation amongst beings of the same nature will work against this. If there are various groups of people oppressed by a class that is more powerful, then it is likely that the oppressed groups will become aware that they would be better off working together and displacing the privilege group.<sup>304</sup> ‘Minds... are conquered not by arms, but by love and nobility,<sup>305</sup> which is to say, in short, that we are all

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<sup>302</sup> Epistle 23. Cited in Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, p 118 .

<sup>303</sup> Ethics, PIV, props. 35 & 40.

<sup>304</sup> This is one aspect of the labour movement, and of Marxist revolutions. Note that this does not mean that the slaveholder is right to keep his slaves until the balance of power swings sufficiently that his position is threatened. The act itself is wrong because it is less than a human being is capable of, irrespective of his current temporal condition. This applies to all wrongdoing. Compare Eichmann, who evidently enjoyed aspects of his work (he was proud of his ‘achievements’). He made himself a person who could not share society with others (there was no hope of emending his intellect) and so he and his kind were ‘removed’ from society (let us set aside the question of capital punishment here).

<sup>305</sup> Ethics, PIV, appendix 11. See also P III, prop. 43.

better off in a compassionate society, whereby every person is equally invested in and benefiting from the socially generated goods.<sup>306</sup>

The second aspect of the argument refers to what we might describe as the ‘mental’ condition of the slaveholder. If he causes sadness in another that is manifestly like him in nature (a thought that is very difficult to repress, as is indicated through Cora Diamond’s examples), then he will also cause sadness in himself, because sympathetically imagines himself in the place of the one who he harms.<sup>307</sup> This is why many people who hurt others become self-loathing.<sup>308</sup> A person may, of course, make efforts to harden himself to these causes of sadness (as discussed in the previous chapter, though there I considered a person hardening himself to reasons), but this will mean closing his mind to a kind of idea that may have otherwise brought joy, love or delight. Conversely, the more knowledge person has of the sadness that is generated through certain affects, the more ‘sensitised’ one becomes evil. For example, as one more clearly associates anger with violence, and violence with sadness, one feels more averse to anger.<sup>309</sup> Spinoza’s discussion of the conflicting affects at work in the human mind is sophisticated and rich. I will not discuss his account of evil any further here, though the general framework applies to what I say in the next chapter in relation to wholeness.

In summary, the core of Spinoza’s doctrine is agency, which is exemplified in the perfect self actualisation of the *causa sui* (God-or-Nature), and for us consists in our intuitive knowledge of our own self-actualisation, i.e. in *scientia intuitiva*. This is the essence of value. Korsgaard approaches this position when she observes our need to ‘succeed’ in our actions (including our judgments; judgments being a form of activity),<sup>310</sup> and in her notion of ‘reflective success’, whereby the self endorses its own reasoning, and hence its own agency. Her appeal to the public nature of reasons is also, I would argue, a move toward the Spinozistic position, in that it shows that there is an aspect of ‘reasonability’ that is independent on the individual, related to his or her interactions with others. However, this independent criteria of reasonableness is not developed by Korsgaard, and in her analysis the

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<sup>306</sup> I am aware that the discussion leaves questions unanswered. As I said at the beginning of the paragraph, I think the issue needs to be mentioned in outline, but cannot be discussed in detail here. The key difference that I am highlighting between the Kantian and Spinozistic approaches is that the Kantian approach centres on reason, while the Spinozistic approach centres on power, which is enabled by reason. The issue of bad behaviour is further canvassed in the next chapter.

<sup>307</sup> Ethics, PIII, prop. 14, scholium & props 16 & 17.

<sup>308</sup> This fits with Giaita’s discussion of remorse in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*. See especially chapter 9.

<sup>309</sup> ‘The knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it.’ Ethics, P IV, prop. 8. ‘An affect toward a thing which we imagine as necessary is more intense, other things equal, than one toward a thing we imagine as possible or contingent, or not necessary.’ Ethics, PIV, prop. 11.

<sup>310</sup> This is described in chapter 5 of *Self-Constitution*. See especially section 5.4.4.

basis of reasons remains as individual reflective endorsement, and thus the shared nature of reasons appears to be merely used as a way of discovering that we agree in what we value, i.e. what we reflectively endorse. Thus, for Korsgaard, value is ‘governed’ by practical identity, rather than by the immanent responsiveness of the agent to the complement in God-or-Nature, in relation to whom being, and hence value, becomes actual. If reflection is governed by our practical identity, then reflection is essentially circular, because our reasons come from our practical identity, and so value is thought to come ‘out of nothing’. In this way Korsgaard’s account of value is reduced to preference, and morality is confined to that which is shown by transcendental argument to be ‘necessarily preferable’ (so to speak).<sup>311</sup>

In this comparison I have not mentioned Spinoza’s conception of eternity. The concept of time barely features in Korsgaard’s discussion, though it must – on Spinozistic analysis – be considered in any discussion of the unity of the self. As I noted earlier, I will consider the implications of Spinoza’s conception of eternity as I discuss the implications of his overall theory of wholeness, which I will do in the following chapter.

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<sup>311</sup> Recall that at the close of her analysis of value in *The Sources of Normativity* Korsgaard settled on the idea that value is a ‘paradox, depending on what we do’ (See pages 79-81.). It is true, on Spinozistic analysis, that value consists in ‘doing’, but this need not be regarded as paradoxical, for it is the ‘natural’ property of a self-actualising being, and could not be any other way.

## CHAPTER 6

### WHOLENESS AS ETERNAL COMMUNITY: IMPLICATIONS OF SPINOZA'S ONTOLOGY

Eternal reality, which Spinoza describes as God-or-Nature, is necessarily indivisible: a seamless whole. Individuals within this whole are finite determinations of the infinite power that creates all of reality. As finite determinations they are only whole in so far as they participate in the activity of the greater whole of which their being is constituted. In isolation we are not whole; indeed, in isolation we do not exist. Wholeness means being 'wholly in the whole',<sup>312</sup> i.e. fully enacting one's nature in reciprocity with one's complement in nature. It is, in other words, in connection to the persons and things that make up our environment that we are whole; in 'perfect response' to the whole that we are complete.<sup>313</sup> These connections constitute our existence in eternal being: finite, determined, and free.

The unity of the person consists in her being a finite determination of infinite eternal agency, essentially interactive with others. This is the bedrock of the Spinozistic view of unity. Though I am a composite of many parts – many individual agents unified in a certain way – there is no cause for *my* actions beside myself. Reduction from the whole to the parts does not explain the actions of the whole but only reveals aspects of it. Thus, in explaining who I am I can describe the ways that I act and the parts that I know about, but in the end there is no explanation besides the whole: I am what I am and not something else. In this respect Spinoza's view is comparable to Kant's idea that the 'Noumenal self' is necessarily and essentially unified, and not reducible to any aspect of her experiential life. It stands opposed to Korsgaard's view that unity is *generated* through principled actions. For Korsgaard unity is essentially a matter of logical coherence. She argues that I can only 'be' myself through acting on coherent principles, and if I do not act in this way then I am nothing: I 'disintegrate'. There is a sense in which this remains true on the Spinozistic account: if I do not *act* then I am nothing. However, actions and reasons are not the same; I am not ontologically dependent on the coherence of my reasons. Reasons are a way of knowing my

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<sup>312</sup> Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 33. Hallett is here quoting Bruno, *De la causa et uno, Dial. II*.

<sup>313</sup> 'Completeness, which is in fact perfect response to the whole, is imaged as more satisfactory connexion with the persons and things which really or apparently constitute our environment'. Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 134, footnote 2.

‘self’, but they are intermediate knowledge. There is a distinction between rational knowledge and that which is known.

In this chapter I develop the ethical implications of the metaphysical conception of wholeness just summarised. These implications are conveyed primarily through three examples, which illustrate varying ways that a person may respond to her ‘environment’, and thereby form her life as a whole. Through these examples I show how a person’s nature is defined by the connections through which she is active, and as integrated or disordered according to how active or passive she is in those connections. This reveals how a person is whole in so far as she is active in response to the greater whole, i.e. how she is participating in eternal being, rather than being subdued or destroyed by that being. However, before I present these examples, some further groundwork is needed to clarify the ontological status of the individual in relationship to what has been termed ‘eternal reality’. In the first section I clarify how the individual is bound as a body interacting with other bodies, and explain how this relates to wholeness. I then describe the problem of wholeness across a typical development path, and indicate how Spinoza’s philosophy changes our understanding of the concepts of meaning, purpose, and connection, which were discussed in chapter four. This groundwork will make the distinctions I wish to draw in discussing the three examples more readily discernable.

## **6.1 Our embodied limits**

Although the person as individual is non-reducible, there is much that can be said about the ways that people (i.e. persons in general) are affected as embodied agents interacting with other bodies. In this section I provide an overview of how an individual is constituted in her body, and how the boundaries of the individual are made ambiguous by the varying ways that her body can be active in relation to her environment.

The unity of the person consists of the unity of her body, which is known through the unified activity of the mind. The body and the mind are not different substances but different ‘attributes’ of the same individual. We are inclined to identify ourselves with our ‘minds’ as distinct from our bodies (a la Descartes) because it is in the attribute of mind that the unity of the body is known, and the body as it is known inadequately (i.e. as an object of perception, extended in space and time) does not exhibit this essential unity, but appears to us to be divisible. For example, I perceive my foot as ‘part’ of my body. I am aware of its connections to other ‘parts’: I see and feel the continuity of my foot and my leg; I feel pain if

my foot is damaged, and can move my foot through the operation of thought. Yet I know that I will not cease to exist if my foot is detached, and this leads me to think that my foot is not an ‘essential’ part of me, but is in some sense separable from me. On Spinozistic analysis, my foot is a part of me so long as I am able to use it, i.e. so long as it is involved in the agency of my unified body.

This involvement may be conceived in two ways: through self-reference or reference to eternal reality. From the point of view of self-reference, my body is whatever I can master, and in so far as something is outside of my control (including ‘parts’ of my own body), it is ‘other’; albeit in some cases a most intimate other, through which I may be powerfully affected. On the other hand, when the body is conceived in reference to eternal reality, it is anything that is causally contributing to the potency that is actualised in my activity. Viewed this way, the human body has a great many ‘parts’ that necessarily belong to it and yet which could never be wholly incorporated under the unity of the actual individual body. This follows from the irrevocable intimacy of our relationship to our complement in nature. We are ontologically bound through our dependency to a range of agents that we can never wholly control. For example, I have no intuitive knowledge of my liver, but I am dependent on its functioning. Similarly, a surgeon is dependent on the nurse who hands her the surgical instruments. A writer is dependent on the community of language speakers that make it possible to communicate by writing. We are all dependent on the sun for warmth and nutrition. These other agents are all necessary to our activities in different ways, but we have only varying degrees of control over them, and varying knowledge of their nature.

It follows that from a durational perspective, the actual boundaries of the body are ‘vague and indeterminate’, depending on our purposes, and the scope of our activity.<sup>314</sup> If something is essential to my activity then it may be regarded as an essential part of my body. If I can continue to act without it, then it is a non-essential part of my body. So, conceived in the narrowest possible sense my body may be limited to the nervous system, sense-organs, and muscles (or perhaps even some yet narrower ‘essence’ of the nervous system). In the widest possible sense it includes anything that aids a person’s ‘response to the universe’, and so may include the keyboard I am typing on, the screen that is reproducing my words, my car as I drive it, the land as I stand upon it, and indeed all the extended universe perceptible to me through sensory operation.<sup>315</sup> We do not tend to think of our bodies in this wider sense

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<sup>314</sup> Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 128.

<sup>315</sup> ‘For everything in the world is ours for thought and in organic response; we must understand the Real as it is reproduced in our own nature.’ Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 135. See also 128-9. In footnote 1 on page 129 Hallett cites two poetic expressions of this idea, one from Thomas Traherne and the other from Richard Jefferies. This is an extract of the Jefferies quotation, which is taken from *The Sun and the Brook*: ‘The grass is not grass alone; the

because many of these ‘extensions’ are remote from our core activity (as it is known to us through ‘imagination’), and seems detachable and/or replaceable, whereas the continuous form that is known through perception is involved in almost all our activities, and its ‘parts’ are generally difficult to detach and replace (the pain of doing so is itself enough to significantly impair our activity). Yet the ‘parts’ of this body are not of equal use to us. It would cause me great harm to lose my foot; less if I was to lose a toe, and none at all if I were to clip my toenails. Therefore I think of my foot as an important part of my body, my toe as a less important part, and my toenail clippings as not. Anything attached to my body that is not necessary to my unified activity is not a necessary part of my body. Equally, anything that I attach to my body to aid this activity becomes a part of my body. I use my contact lenses during much of my waking life; more indeed than I use my fingernails (which they resemble in size and appearance), and so I might say that my contact lenses are more a part of me than my finger nails. However, I tend not to think this way because the latter are much less easily detached (it would hurt to do so), and the former are replaceable.

## 6.2 Wholeness and partiality

In this section I will describe how the mind comes to know the unified body, and how the limitations of the body relate to the concept of wholeness. Complete or absolute wholeness – the perfect life – is not attainable for a finite agent because the power of a finite agent waxes and wanes as knowledge increases and as the body is affected by other agents.<sup>316</sup> This is why finite agents must act ‘reflectively’: their agency is subject to disruption, and whenever this happens they must examine their relations to others, and assess how they can most fully act in the circumstances they are facing. To illustrate, let us again consider an infant who has only limited knowledge of the body that is given to her, and hence limited agency. She may observe her limbs moving before her eyes and ‘reach’ for objects that pass by, but she does not immediately integrate her observation with her reaching. At this stage of development the hand and the eye are not ‘coordinated’. So, while in a sense she is the agent of both activities, these actions are merely associated; she does not have intuitive knowledge of how these

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leaves of the ash above are not leaves only... the grass sways and fans the reposing mind; the leaves sway and stroke it, till it can feel beyond itself and with them, using each grass blade, each leaf, to abstract life from earth and ether. These then become new organs, fresh nerves and veins running afar out into the field, along the winding brook, up through the leaves, bringing a larger existence. The arms of the mind open wide to the broad sky.’

<sup>316</sup> ‘A thing is real, is free, embodies values, in proportion to its wholeness; and though only the absolute whole is wholly real and free and perfect, yet every real part of the infinite whole is itself a partial whole, and is to that degree real and free and valuable’. Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 232.

different parts of her body are integrated. When the mind is able to intuit the connection between these two parts she becomes able to combine the activities. In this way she increases the unity of her self, and as she does this she increases her power of acting (this is why infants and young children experience such joy simply by moving: they perceive their power to be increasing as they do).<sup>317</sup>

Most people who are ‘able bodied’ learn to control their bodies so as to be able to execute the basic set of tasks that are required for a typical human life, e.g. standing, walking, eating, speaking, and so on. Having learned these elementary skills a person will then look to develop other abilities so as to expand her power of acting in her particular environment of ‘persons and things’. This development is naturally responsive to the threats that she encounters and the encouragements that she receives, and is conditioned by the socio-economic order within which she lives. Our difficulties arise from our limited power, and the inherent uncertainty in discerning what we must accept and what can be changed (i.e. what is necessary). Each individual life involves individual challenges. For example, some are not able to develop according to the ‘normal’ form, others are rendered incapable by misfortune, and we are all vulnerable to many kinds of hurt. Even in success we are prone to discontentment, and may, moreover, be troubled by our awareness of our durational existence: the knowledge that what we have now may be taken from us and that at some point our bodies will die. These difficulties are common causes of suffering. On the Spinozistic analysis, they are causes of suffering because they involve a restriction, reduction or annihilation of our power of acting, which by nature we strive to preserve. We suffer such restrictions, reductions, and annihilation because of our finitude. Our power is limited and so we are vulnerable to harms; harms that arise through our interaction with agents contrary to our nature, and by which we are eventually destroyed.

The ‘task’ of life is, as Korsgaard noted, to ‘constitute oneself’. However, this is not achieved by holding doggedly to certain principles, but by enacting one’s essential nature, i.e. by responding to the circumstances of one’s life in a manner that most fully expresses ones inherent worth as a free part of the whole. When one responds in this way one participates in the eternal activity of God-or-Nature, and so inhabits the blessedness, or ‘intellectual love of God’, that comes with unhindered agency.<sup>318</sup> This is, as I have outlined, the Spinozistic conception of wholeness. From an eternal perspective, wholeness simply is the complete

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<sup>317</sup> One may recall here the brief discussion in chapter two of how Kant’s transcendental unity develops knowledge of itself through perceiving itself in experience. Spinoza ontology enables a much fuller account of this development; in particular, it provides a clear connection between value and development, which is often carried in the concept of ‘growth’.

<sup>318</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 36.

actualisation of the individual's nature. There is no before or after in eternity, and hence the eternal self does not move in and out of states of wholeness. Thus, *unwholeness* is a condition of alienation from oneself: the state of durational endeavour. From this durational perspective, wholeness is relative to the current capacity of the individual concerned, including an estimation of potential capacity over time.

In completeness one becomes more empowered and so becomes incomplete. In this respect the task of achieving wholeness has a dialectical form. One must readjust one's actions and expectations in response to what is thought to best actualise one's nature, which is in turn based on knowledge of what has been achieved. For example, an infant is less capable than an adult, and so requires less in order to be whole, at least in the certain portion of her existence that is currently present as her infant form. An infant may be 'complete' so long as she has food, rest, comfort and play. Adults, and indeed children, are capable of much more, and so are presented with many more choices, and hence require more in order to be complete. On the other hand, because infants have less power they are more vulnerable, which means that they are less able to moderate their activity in response to others. Adults can do more to help themselves, and are by their superior knowledge capable of directing their attention away from the sources of their weakness onto the sources of their strength. This means that they can resist the reactive impulses that 'pull them' away from the active unity of which they are constituted, and to respond instead in a manner that is congruent with 'who they are'.

The degree to which we can act freely is governed by the degree to which one has adequate knowledge of one's nature in relation to one's environment. As composites of many parts we are affected in many ways, and thus knowledge of ourselves and our environment takes many forms. Each of our 'parts' can produce a particular kind of knowledge. The hands, for example, can learn to 'work' a keyboard. The limbs working together can be trained to ride a bicycle.<sup>319</sup> The visual system can learn to distinguish different types of art, and the auditory system can learn to discern musical variations. And so on and so forth. Through developing such skills the body is able to be more active, and the person is capable of more forms of enjoyment, and of realising more value. Generally speaking, the greater the variety of activities a person is able to engage in – the more extensive her knowledge of the things that she encounters in her environment – the more 'resilient' she will be, for she will have more ways of remaining active if and when her body declines, whereas, by contrast, a person whose range of activity is comparatively narrow may be more likely to perceive

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<sup>319</sup> Note that the parts that are mentioned here are only approximations of the actual agencies involved. The limbs do not work on their own, but in association with the motor cortex etc.

herself to be wholly ‘disabled’ by setbacks that inhibit her comparatively narrow scope of activity.<sup>320</sup> However, having skills and interests does not necessarily make a person more complete or more whole. The critical question is whether one is freely engaged in exercising such skills and interests, which is a matter of relating them to the overall unity of one’s action, and this – as I said – requires adequate knowledge of oneself and one’s relationships to others.

### 6.3 The development of self-knowledge

Here I will provide an overview of how we increase in self knowledge and thereby act more freely, and so become more unified in our minds.

Knowledge of our own nature is given primarily in the quality of our affects (*scientia intuitiva*), and secondarily (and provisionally) in the ideas of the properties we have in common (*ratio*), and thirdly through imaginational knowledge in so far as this may be rendered adequate through emendation. Free action is known in the feeling that Spinoza’s terms ‘intellectual love’, which is the awareness of oneself as the individual cause of one’s actions. When I am riding a bicycle I am aware of an immanent control over the direction and speed of the bicycle, and – in so far as my attention is unified in this action – this awareness brings with it a sense of enjoyment. This indicates that riding a bicycle is expressive of my nature. That I do not easily give *all* of my attention to this activity indicates that it is only a part of my nature. Like most people I prefer to ride in fair weather, which follows from the natural fact that my body acts more freely when warm (as with all mammals). I also tend to regard cycling as a functional activity, which means that I want to give my attention to where I am going, and am more likely to enjoy the activity if I enjoy the thought of where I am going to.

As complex composites beings our nature surpasses any one simple activity (such as riding a bike). To achieve wholeness I need to integrate the agents that comprise my body, and this is achieved through focusing attention on the affects that are joyful and turning attention away from the affects that lead to sadness.<sup>321</sup> A simple illustration of this is the idea of a ‘balanced’ diet as being better for our health. Most of us are aware that it is not ‘good’ to overindulge in certain food and drink. It may *seem* good ‘at the time’ to, say, eat too much sugar, and that is because doing so excites certain impulses, and may be temporarily

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<sup>320</sup> Ethics, P IV, prop. 38. ‘Whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to a man... on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful.’

<sup>321</sup> ‘We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.’ Ethics, PIII, prop. 28.

energising (and thus one part of the body is successfully actualised). The problem (which most of us are aware of) is that overindulgence decreases the power of other parts of our bodies (my energy levels over a longer period of time). The knowledge of this harm produces in our minds a feeling that prompts not to overindulge in the same way again, i.e. to view such activity as bad. The more that this knowledge is adequate, i.e. the more truly it is related to our whole body, the more that this affect is strengthened, and the easier it is to eat well. As has been stated, we know that this knowledge is adequate by the quality of the affects involved: when we eat well and exercise we feel ‘healthier’, which is to say, more whole, or more unified.

Of course, this example of a balanced diet is, or should be, merely a microcosm of our overall endeavour. ‘Wholeness’ surpasses the kind of physical health that is achieved through diet and exercise in so far as a person’s agency surpasses and does not depend on that which can be achieved through this particular bodily condition. It is generally true that a person is more empowered through maintaining a healthy body (in the conventional sense), but it would be disempowering to think of all of one’s activities as requiring such a body. As finite creatures we are all subject to constraints and eventual destruction, and as such we must appraise our activities in response to what is possible. As noted above, wholeness from a durational standpoint is relative to current capacity. So, even in sickness a person can be whole, if she can accept the necessity of her condition and focussing attention on the ways in which the body remains active, or – more precisely speaking – is *eternally* active.<sup>322</sup> ‘Blessedness’ or ‘quietude of mind’ requires the knowledge that one has presently done as much as is possible, i.e. that one’s actions faithfully actualise one’s nature. This is why it is so important for patients to have a clear prognosis, even when the ‘news’ is bad. Through knowing what is possible one can adapt one’s body and expectations in the light of the encroaching limitations. Doubt about one’s condition, and uncertainty about the future, can be very disquieting, especially for those who are ill.

#### **6.4 Knowledge of one’s eternal being**

Though Spinoza’s philosophy gives much attention to the changing nature of our minds and bodies, he nevertheless affirms the eternal status of the finite individual in the infinite order of nature. All knowledge, he maintains, arises from knowledge of our eternal nature, i.e. by

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<sup>322</sup> Discussion of what this conception of eternity practically amounts to will be undertaken in the following sections.

adequate understanding our own agency and our relation to others.<sup>323</sup> Much of our knowledge is inadequate, arising from our self-referent disposition. From this perspective our existence is indeterminate, isolated (and hence partial), and frustrated. A ‘partial’ and ‘indeterminate’ being cannot be whole, and so when we think of ourselves on the basis of inadequate knowledge (i.e. in terms of our durational existence) our life may appear as an association of otherwise disparate parts that are united merely by their temporal proximity and perceived resemblances, much as Hume proposed. Durational life, abstracted from eternity (i.e. reality), seems no more than a series of events, or phenomenal ‘moments’, that occur in particular ‘sections’ of space, beginning at birth and ending at our death. However, as has been discussed, on Spinozistic principles existence can never be merely ‘durational’, but must be in some degree eternal.<sup>324</sup> This eternal nature is the unity of the individual as a unique agent.<sup>325</sup>

A simple illustration of a person seeing his life under a ‘species of eternity’<sup>326</sup> is provided in Frankl’s example of the mountaineer who sees a mountain sunset and is ‘so moved by the splendour of nature that he feels cold shudders running down his spine’ and could never again regard his life as meaningless.<sup>327</sup> This claim makes no sense if we think of value solely in terms of experience (e.g. as the feeling of wonder that is experienced in ‘the event’), because after the experience is ‘had’ there is no ‘value’ to derive, except perhaps through the memory, which is only ever occasional and is for most people unreliable (the idea of something is not the thing itself). Following Spinoza we may interpret this experience as a ‘moment’ of eternity, i.e. an aspect of the person that is perfectly actualised in response to a part of God or Nature. This actualisation quickens the being of the individual, and so affirms his knowledge of his own worth, i.e. the ‘meaning’ of his life.<sup>328</sup> We cannot say with certainty why the mountain affects him in this way, as we do not have knowledge of the nature of this person, though it is perhaps that as the mountaineer enjoys the activity of his senses and intellect in beholding this scene – the grandeur of the mountain with the sun behind it – he is given an idea of the infinite power of nature, and the inexhaustible potential that is available for the human body to delight in, and at the same time his own relative impotence as an isolated individual. Thus he is moved to knowledge of himself as a part of

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<sup>323</sup> Ethics, P II, prop. 30.

<sup>324</sup> ‘...a temporal existence in so far as it is purely temporal is the same as non-existence, and is perishing in proportion to its fragmentariness and exclusiveness...’ Hallett, *Aeternitas*, 45.

<sup>325</sup> ‘The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists.’ Ethics, PI, prop. 11.

<sup>326</sup> This phrase is used throughout part five of the Ethics.

<sup>327</sup> Cited on page 107.

<sup>328</sup> The concept of ‘meaning’ is discussed further in the following section

the greater whole, and as in that respect eternal, and so never again doubts the worth of his life.<sup>329</sup>

The difficulty for many of us (perhaps all of us at times) is that our knowledge of the worth of our lives is buffeted by the continual adjustments required by our interactions with others. We experience nature as an obstruction to our agency, and so are isolated and ‘broken down’ such that we find ourselves unable to accept the necessity of our limitations, which are continuously before us. As we have seen, the metaphysical basis of this difficulty is that ‘the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpasses by the power of external causes’.<sup>330</sup> In other words, the self being entwined in the indeterminable agency of a partially hostile world is continually vulnerable to causes of sadness. Consequently, our power of acting is often restricted, and our being becomes a matter of exertion. The greater the sadness that one is subject to, the harder it becomes to assert one’s existence in a manner that builds self-love. However, the opposite is also true, in that the more securely the self is fixed in knowledge of its innate value, the less vulnerable it is to the afflicting affects, and more it is able to remain integrated. The more a person has knowledge of her own power, and that which contributes to her power, the more deliberate or purposeful she is in her actions, and the more secure she is of her own worth.

As I partly outlined in chapter four, there is a general consensus that a person who has ‘meaning’, or ‘purpose’, or who is ‘connected’, is more able to value her life despite suffering.<sup>331</sup> In the next section I outline how these concepts may to be understood within Spinoza’s ontology. This will further illustrate how this framework takes us beyond an intersubjective approach such as I developed from Korsgaard’s Kantian metaphysics. In the following section I will discuss the three examples that I believe further illustrate the role of our ‘eternal’ nature in governing our durational life.

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<sup>329</sup> Interestingly, part of Frankl’s response to the idea that the passage of time and the inevitability of death nullify the value of life was to argue that a value realised is ‘kept’ in by the inviolability of the past. ‘Passing time is ... not only a thief, but a trustee’. Victor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 33. Spinoza’s philosophy supports this point, they he would perhaps not use the same terminology. Spinoza would perhaps say that what is real cannot be made unreal.

<sup>330</sup> Ethics, P IV, prop. 3.

<sup>331</sup> In chapter four I only discussed meaning and purpose explicitly, not connection. This was partly because I could not easily link this concept with the intersubjective account of value. Cassell links healing with connectedness as he explains healing as wholeness: ‘to be whole is to be in relationship to yourself ... your body, to the culture and significant others’. Quoted in Egnew, ‘The Meaning of Healing: Transcending Suffering’, 255-62.

## 6.5 Meaning, purpose and connection

In my previous discussion of meaning I connected Victor Frank's claim that the 'will to meaning' is the fundamental human drive with Korsgaard's claim that we act out of a conception of what makes our lives worth living (a 'practical identity'). Under Korsgaard's neo-Kantian framework the 'will to meaning' was explained through our need to reflect and act rationally. This, I argued, did not in itself explain what sort of meanings a person should act upon, nor how some things come to be more meaningful than others (though this matter could be partly explained through the logical importance of a given meaning within an overall practical identity; what we might call the relative 'centrality' of value). On Spinozistic analysis, the need for meaning must be understood under the fundamental drive to 'persevere in one's being', which – as has been discussed – is achieved through adequate knowledge of the unified body. Meaning, conceived as a description of oneself and one's relationship to persons and things, is a variety of the second kind of knowledge, which we depend on in the absence of perfect knowledge. It is, as Spinoza's notes, impossible to have intuitive knowledge of everything that one may encounter, and so we must supply ourselves with as many general rules (or as much general information) as possible so as to best prepare ourselves to adapt to individuals as we encounter them.<sup>332</sup> Thus, in describing what is 'meaningful' to me, I articulate an idea of who I am and how I actualise myself. Such descriptions will often include an idea of that which I love, i.e. that which I regard as enhancing and/or supporting my being. Meaning is 'found' in anything that enables or inspires me in these ways. For example, an experience that significantly alters my understanding of myself, and the ways that I act in the world, may be subsequently described as meaningful. The notion of degrees of meaning is explained on this account in terms of the degree to which something empowers or enhances my life. The importance of meaning in the midst of suffering is similarly transparent: a person with 'deep' sense of meaning has a greater knowledge of how they are active, and hence are more secure in the knowledge of their own value. Thus, the presence of meaning enables or supports wholeness.

The characteristic association of meaning and purpose is explained in the Spinozistic analysis of action, which conceives action not as a series of connected events but rather as the actualisation of potential. To actualise potential is to 'determine' a draught of infinite

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<sup>332</sup> "...we can have only a quite inadequate knowledge of the duration of things, and we determine their times of existing only by the imagination, which is not equally affected by the image of a present thing and the image of a future one. That is why the true knowledge we have of good and evil is only abstract, *or* universal, and the judgment we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes, so that we may be able to determine what in the present is good or evil for us, is imaginary, rather than real.' Ethics, PIV, prop. 62.

indeterminate energy, and so is necessary purposive. In acting I am always bringing something into being. Thus, to be without purpose is to be without power, and so a person without purpose will be devoid of meaning, and incapable of being whole. Conversely, if I have meaning then I also have a purpose, i.e. knowledge of how I am active and valuable.

Commitment to a purpose can operate as a binding and positive affect around which one can unify the affects of which one is composed. This increases as the purpose we effect increases the power of others who are like us, for in doing this we are able to think of ourselves as by association also more powerful. Affects that threaten to reduce our power can be subsumed under those joyful affects through which it is increased, and thus through purpose we become more alive, more real, and hence we inhabit eternity. We become unconscious of time in the enjoyment of what we are doing. Indeed, as one is effectively active, one ceases to consider meaning and purpose (or ethics), because these problems or questions are all resolved. To enact one's nature is self-authenticating and self-justifying, and so one does not question nor explain.

If we are wondering about purpose and meaning then it must be that we are struggling to actualise our nature, and any specification that we arrive at will belong to the second kind of knowledge, i.e. it will be an idea of what we typically enjoy doing, not an idea of the act itself. Indeed, given that all descriptions belong to the second kind of knowledge, and that there can be no general description of the value of an individual (this being intrinsic to the being of that individual), so too there can be no general description of the meaning or purpose of an individual life. So, when people speak of the meaning or purpose of their life, they are not speaking of the actual meaning, but only a common property of that meaning or purpose.<sup>333</sup> Meaning consists in being active in the particular way that I am active, either through self-determination or through delight in others.

This last point partly explains why people often find it difficult to 'find' their purpose. As eternal reality is *causa-sui*, and acts for no other purpose than to express its nature, so also we as finite determinations of eternal reality have no other purpose than to be that which we are. Hence, an individual could never truly regard the total negation of her own agency as

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<sup>333</sup> Kishik has argued, in reference to Wittgenstein's account of language and corresponding critique of philosophy, that meaning is something inherent to life, and that people who are seeking for meaning have for some reason abstracted themselves from life, or 'stepped outside the ordinary stream of life'. See Kishik, 'Wittgenstein on the Meaning of Life'. This position comes close the Spinozistic account that I have outlined here, though it lacks any specification of what may cause us to disengage from our natural activity, or of how we may authentically re-engage (i.e., re-enter the 'stream of life'), and this is because there is no underlying metaphysics of value (i.e. no account of why life is meaningful). If a person is no longer evaluating life in the way she was before, such that she finds her life to be empty, it is likely to be little use suggesting to her that she 'look again' at the meanings that are available. It may help, but only if she is on further reflection able to restore a sense of what it is that is valuable about those meanings, i.e. only if there she is restored to her previous evaluation.

good, unless she is in despair, and to this extent Spinoza's position is here in agreement with Kant's view that persons are 'end-in-themselves'.<sup>334</sup> However, it does not follow from this that a person's purpose should be wholly self-orientated, for in Spinoza's view it is not possible for a person to be an 'end' in isolation. All of our 'ends' are worked out in relation to others, and so we are not – strictly speaking – ends-in-ourselves but ends-in-relation. God-or-Nature is the only true end-in-itself. We can never self-actualise without the cooperative agency of our complement in nature, and so purpose must also always be conceived in relation to something or someone else. I cannot be a teacher without students; I cannot be a friend without a friend and so on. In order to achieve our own end we must join our ends with another, in a manner that respects the other as co-agent, i.e. as an end.<sup>335</sup> The more effectively we can do this the more fully we become 'ourselves'. This is the metaphysical basis of the often heard view that meaning or purpose is found through 'connection' to something other than (and perhaps 'greater' than) oneself. This idea was expressed in Frankl's claim that a person 'finds himself only to the extent to which he loses himself in the first place, be it for the sake of something or somebody, for the sake of a cause or a fellow man, or 'for God's sake' ...'. The struggle for self, claimed Frankl is 'doomed to failure unless it is enacted as dedication and devotion to something beyond his self, to something above his self.'<sup>336</sup>

This link between meaning and connectedness is also highlighted in another popular 'inspirational' work called 'Tuesdays with Morrie', which recounts a series of conversations between the author 'Mitch' and his University supervisor 'Morrie', who was dying of a form of Motor Neuron Disease. The question of life's meaning in the midst of suffering is a central theme of the book, and the inquiry is framed around the idea that Morrie has found something

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<sup>334</sup> This is not to say that a person could never choose an action that leads to her death. Death itself is not the defeat of the self, and so there may be many good ways of dying, i.e. ways of dying that are congruent with one's nature.

<sup>335</sup> As Hallett points out, if we regard anything only as a means to our own end and deny it as an end-in-itself, then we deny its nature, and it can be of real use to us. This applies not simply to people, but to our interactions with anything. It is a poor craftsman who does not 'respect' his tools. Conversely, it is through sympathy with and understanding of the other that we are able to enjoy it. See Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 157 and *Creation, Emanation and Salvation*, 215.

<sup>336</sup> Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 83. This passage was also cited in chapter 3 note 53. Another scholarly discussion of meaning that converges on the importance of connection and reciprocity is Eagleton's book 'The meaning of Life'. Following Aristotelian writers such as Nussbaum, Eagleton offers the image of a Jazz band as his representation of a meaningful life, citing the creative interplay of the various members, each responsive to the others and each making a distinct contribution to the whole that is the music. Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life*. See also Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 155-6. Nussbaum argues that 'good ethical judgment' is like good jazz music (or, more precisely, improvisation), in that the agent must act creatively in response to particular situations in ways that are 'responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context'.

that others, including Mitch, are lacking. Morrie's advice to Mitch is summarised in this statement:

‘So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they're chasing the wrong things. The way to get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.’<sup>337</sup>

The slight tautology in the last sentence is curious as it reflects the inherent mutually of agency that has been discussed: I ‘get meaning’ in my life by devoting myself to an activity that ‘gives me’ meaning; thus meaning is identified, committed to, and also given.

In summary, developing a clear idea of one's ‘meaning and purpose’ requires action, reflection, and attention to the environment of ‘persons and things’ with which one is interactive. Through learning what it is that one enjoys doing, and where and with whom one enjoys being, one forms a more adequate idea of who one is. By reflecting on this identity in the light of one's constraints and limitations one comes to know what is required to remain in unity. The benefit of a description or specification of purpose (or of what one finds meaningful) is that it can help in focusing the mind. To carry such a description (or descriptions) is, one might say, a technique for holding attention on a certain aspect of one's nature, and of avoiding distractions that may engender sadness. It can therefore be a very productive and empowering policy. The problem with focussing solely on ‘meaning’ is that such descriptions can only convey certain common properties of one's nature, and so it is unwise to be wholly guided by them. To pursue a meaning or purpose as if it were an idea of oneself, and not simply an idea of an aspect of oneself, inclines one to neglect other aspects of one's nature, and thereby engenders unfulfilment and ultimately brokenness. Similarly, a person who wholly dedicates herself to a ‘purpose’ may render herself incapable of wholeness because she would not know herself when the purpose is achieved. Being wholly orientating toward the future, she is estranged from eternity, and of the ‘intellectual love of God’, which is the imminent enjoyment of being itself.

To enjoy ‘being itself’ is to enjoy one's life as whole, i.e. oneself as a free agent whose nature is actualised in participation with a certain community in God-or-Nature. It is this ontological dependence that makes our connections to others so especially important.

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<sup>337</sup> Albon, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, 43.

Certain people, places and things have enabled my existence, and with certain people, places and things I am most free to be myself. It is when being with such people, in such places, or in relation to such things – or even in the presence of the *idea* of these individuals – that I am made sure of my own value. In general terms, when we find something to be good we endeavour to live in a manner that is congruent with that good, whereas we endeavour to live at odds with things we find to be bad. This is why it can be so destructive for us to be estranged from those people or things that we have loved before: if we cannot think of ourselves as integrated with those others then we have essentially ‘lost’ a part of ourselves. Therefore our minds seek to think in ways that are faithful to those others. This was illustrated in Frankl’s example of the grieving Doctor, who recognised that he must accept the suffering of his loss in order to be faithful to the ‘only treasure he still possessed’, *viz.* his ability to enjoy the knowledge of the love that comprises a greater part of who he is.<sup>338</sup> This thought does not remove the pain, but it does give him a sense of resolve, *i.e.* a feeling through which he can act, and this – as is clear under the Spinozistic framework – restores a sense of value to his life.

‘Connections’ can of course take a variety of forms, and some are evidently better than others. This doctor’s relationship to his wife is clearly a good form of connection, whereas, for example, Eichmann’s connection to the Nazi party was a bad form of connection in that it rested on an inhuman and dehumanizing falsity. In the next section I will attempt to illustrate further the ways in which a person may relate to others, and how these relationships may be more or less empowering. This will provide a sense of how a person’s life may express varying ‘species of eternity’.

## 6.6 ‘Species of eternity’

‘He who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.’<sup>339</sup>

In this section I will attempt to illustrate how I understand a person’s mind to be more or less ‘eternal’ following Spinoza’s analysis. This is central to the question of wholeness, for it is as finite determinations of eternal reality that we are ‘whole’. Thus, the more we are able to exhibit this eternity the more we are whole. There are two specific points that emerge from the examples I offer. The first concerns the manner in which our ‘eternal nature’ is identified.

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<sup>338</sup> This was introduced on page 104.

<sup>339</sup> Ethics, P V, prop. 39.

For Spinoza, to be active is to be real, to be real is to be perfect, and to be perfect is to be eternal. If, as has been discussed, the eternal part of a person equates with his agency, and if he perceives his agency to be increasing in the feeling of joy, and knows it to be perfect in ‘intellectual joy’, it follows that we should identify the eternal part of a person through that which brings them joy: in those parts of their life when they perceive themselves to be most ‘alive’. Moreover, as we are only able to act in so far as our body is co-operant with others, it follows that the eternal part will always involve a relationship of some kind. This brings us to the second point: the degree to which a person is ‘eternal’ turns on the manner in which they relate to others. Wholeness as ‘perfect response to the whole’ is being connected to the persons and things that ‘really or apparently constitute our environment’ in such a way that one’s body is more active.<sup>340</sup> A person is more whole as his interactions with others are more empowering than obstructive, and as his interactions give rise to joy and not sadness. Thus, intellectual joy cannot stem from outright appropriation or assimilation, or from subjugation or acquiescence. In actualising potential one must have a measure of respect both for oneself and for whatever or whoever one is interacting with. Generally speaking, we are more empowered as we empower those others whose nature agrees with and contributes to ours. If we devalue those others we devalue ourselves.

### 6.6.1 Example one

My first example centres on a football fan who died in a hospice, and whose last act was to cheer for his team. I came upon this example on an internet forum for the London based football club Tottenham Hotspur. This is a forum for fans to read and discuss topics or questions related to their team; most major football teams have at least a few of these ‘fansites’. The example was posted as a ‘thread’ for discussion shortly after a weekend game in 2010 in which Tottenham Hotspur were at the stadium of local rivals Arsenal, and came from 2-nil down to win 2-3. This was the opening ‘post’:

‘A Sad But Nice Story from Saturday...’

Somebody I know has been battling cancer for a while now, he has deteriorated rapidly recently and was in a lot of pain...

I heard today that he died on Saturday but only after being told by the hospice nurse

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<sup>340</sup> Hallett, *Aeternitas*, p 134. Footnote 2. Cited on page 151.

that his beloved Spurs had beaten Arsenal, he apparently sat up give it a big Yid Army and a smile then passed away...

At least he was smiling when he went...<sup>341</sup>

When I first read this I was unsure what to think about it. The other fans who replied were almost unanimous in their enthusiasm. Here is a selection of the more positive responses:

‘love never ends... RIP’;

‘RIP Beautiful story, i know him and jesus are giving all the gooners up there a hard time’;

‘just returned from a family funeral and this touched me (ironic that the aunt was a gooner and i missed the match as it was on saturday in ireland) but if you asked me how id like to go .id say just like him after finding out we had smashed a record and the smirk off the goons faces.....coming back by 3. RIP Brother yiddo’;

‘yeah, nice sotry. And to think that there are Spurs supporters out there who may have had their lives cut short who never in their lifetime got a chance to watch Spurs beat the scum away from home.’;

‘In his situation there couldn't have been a better way for him to go’;

‘What a great way to go.’<sup>342</sup>

Many find it difficult to understand the intense personal investment of some people in the fortunes of sports teams, and many would question whether this really is a ‘great way to go’. I will not discuss the psychology of the modern sports fan in any great detail, as this would take us away from the present topic (and it has in any case been well covered in other literature). It is however worth considering how that psychology fits with Spinoza’s discussion of the ‘affects’, as this will further illustrate Spinoza’s position, and more importantly illustrate one way in which people may unify their lives under a certain species of eternity.

According to Spinoza, an individual is driven to actualise his potential. As a complex composite being there are multiple ways in which a person may do this. When he joins his agency with others who are like him he perceives his power of acting to be increased. To

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<sup>341</sup> I have left the text here as it was written on the discussion board. ‘Yid Army’ is a chant popular among Tottenham Hotspur supporters. Sourced on 22.11.2010:

<http://glory-glory.co.uk/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=51325&sid=ea99b7e88b7e9c1afe5d584f31bf83e7..>

‘Goon’ or ‘gooner’ is a term used to describe Arsenal players or supporters. ‘Yiddo’ or ‘Yid’ is a term Tottenham Hotspur fans use to described themselves or Tottenham Hotspur players.

<sup>342</sup> The responses have been reproduced as they were written on the discussion board.

combine agency requires a shared purpose. For football fans this purpose is the success of the team. Having identified oneself with the team (i.e. directed one's agency in line with the success of the team) one then experiences joy and sadness in association with the team's success and failure. These feelings are intensified when one is amongst other fans who share in this identity (fans often talk about the great joy that is experienced when singing or chanting in the stands).<sup>343</sup> Because these are strong, intense feelings, a person will naturally imagine that in these moments he is more empowered, and hence more himself. He will therefore be drawn to repeat the activities associated with those feelings and so continue following the team (or, in the case of sad feelings, to avoid them, which perversely means continuing to *support* the team because it is thought that this will prevent them from losing). In this way a person will come to value his life in relation to the success of the team, and this value may come to override other values (depending on how completely the person gives herself to this purpose). So it is that when a dying fan hears that his team have defeated (finally) their 'hated' rivals on their own ground, he can forget his pain, feel a rush of joy and manage a final shout.

Is this then a 'good death'? Do the actions described actualise a person's 'eternal' nature? There is no reason to question the sincerity of the feelings that are expressed, and in the absence of further information one might well agree with the respondent who said 'in his situation there couldn't have been a better way for him to go'. If this man's connection to the football club constituted his most firmly held values – those which constitute the greater part of his mind (or soul) – then it is, on Spinozistic analysis, his portion of eternal life. However, I also think that there are good reasons for not getting into this 'situation', i.e. for not making a football team the greater part of one's mind, or the substance of one's bodily connection to God-or-Nature. These reasons are I suspect comparatively obvious as they are readily extracted from Spinoza's ethics.

Firstly, since the individual has virtually no control over the team's success (other than cheering them and jeering the opposition, which does have a demonstrable if limited effect), he has no control over his purpose and hence no control over how he feels. Thus, he is not free to choose the manner of his death, but is wholly dependent. Of course, many football fans are sensitive to this problem, if only because most teams will fail to achieve the perceived measures of success (e.g. only one team wins the league in any given season). It is I suggest because they are aware of this problem that many fans feel the need to focus their support on less transient values, such as the traditions of 'the club' (most of these are

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<sup>343</sup> See for example Parks, *A Season with Verona*.

mythological; they tend to refer to the style of play or the character of past players), or the authenticity and passion of the supporters (it is considered better to attend the games regularly, especially away games; to have some genealogical connection to the area that the club is from, even though it is likely that none of the players do; and to be able to maintain one's fervour even in defeat). They may also emphasize the loyalty of the fans to each other, and what they share before, during, and after the games. In these ways the 'object' of love is not merely tied to a 'shallow' moment, i.e. the events of a given day (such as whether a shot happens to beat the keeper), but rather incorporates notions of permanence and belonging, and so takes on aspects of eternity.

On Spinozistic analysis, these connections involve genuine aspects of the 'eternal' because they institute a form of community through which people may join together to produce certain human potentials. However, they also establish patterns of behaviour and thought that undermine the worth of the individual and oppose collective enjoyment. The worth of the individual who forms his life around these connections is largely dependant on external agencies. Moreover, competitive sports divide 'winners' and 'losers' and thereby foster enmity between people, ultimately rendering the worth of one person as dependent on the worthlessness of another. Of course, most people do not *seriously* think this way, i.e. they do not advocate such a conception of human worth, perhaps because they are dimly aware that it is unsustainable. Nevertheless, they do talk and act as though it were the case, as is evident in the responses ('him and Jesus are giving all the gooners up there a hard time'), and such thoughts are often powerful enough to disrupt the integrity of a person's mind. It is difficult, in short, to integrate these ideas with an idea of human life as necessarily worthwhile, i.e. it is difficult to *really* care about the outcome of the game (and so genuinely feel the feelings), truly love the club, and at the same time acknowledge that it is 'only a game'. In the grip of this tension the fan is confronted by a variant of sadness and a need for decision. If he does not have anything else that can empower him – anything else towards which he can direct his love – then this tension leads to a form of self-hatred: loving the club while knowing that it causes him to be sad. This weakens his ability to act and so realise value, and thus reduces his capacity for wholeness.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> I should perhaps stress that I am not making a general pronouncement on the value of sport as such, but on the way that many people express their nature through following sport. Sport is many things, and people relate to it in various ways. One of the participants in Balfour Mount's study identifies himself as a sportsman, and says that the mentality that comes with this helps him to respond positively to his diagnosis: '... if you are a sportsman, you have the philosophy of accepting defeat. That is the thing that is strongest in me. I've developed this through my life. I won't stop trying ... You have to be a sportsman and accept the outcome... I'm not the type not to accept reality, but it's just that I'm not giving up.' Mount, Boston, and Cohen, 'Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being', 380.

If my analysis of the situation is correct, then it shows that there are better and worse ways of forming one's connection to God-or-Nature. A worse form renders the greater part of the individual passive and transient, while a better form renders the greater part active and real (i.e. truly eternal). While it is perhaps difficult to precisely determine the degrees of activity and reality in certain cases, nevertheless I suggest that these qualities are typically shown in the stability, integrity and self assurance of the person. This integrity and confidence is not possible if that which the individual loves – her connection to God-or-Nature – is erratic or changeable. These arise from connections which actualise a 'greater part' of body, and so make a greater part of the mind eternal.

### 6.6.2 Example two

My second example is an extract from Pablo Casals' autobiography. It comes via Raimond Gaita who took it from an essay of R. F. Holland's:

'For the past 80 years I have started each day in the same manner. It is not a mechanical routine but something essential to my daily life. I go to the piano, and I play two preludes and fugues of Bach. I cannot think of doing otherwise. It is a sort of benediction on the house. But that is not its only meaning for me. It is a re-discovery of the world of which I have the joy of being a part. It fills me with awareness of the wonder of life, with the feeling of the incredible marvel of being a human being...

I do not think a day has passed in my life in which I have failed to look with fresh amazement at the miracle of nature.

If you continue to work and to absorb the beauty in the world about you, you find that age does not necessarily mean getting old.<sup>345</sup>

Gaita describes Casals' relation to music as one of pure 'spiritual' love, comparable with the love a religious person may feel towards God.<sup>346</sup> He describes it as expressed '*in the accent of gratitude*',<sup>347</sup> i.e. with a sense that life is a 'gift', for which gratitude is the appropriate response. He is also concerned to show that this gratitude is intelligible, and may have 'honest completion', independently of any specific religious statement or 'metaphysical'

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<sup>345</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 219. Taken from Holland's 'Education and Value' in Holland, *Against Empiricism*.

<sup>346</sup> Gaita compares the passage from Casals with a passage from Augustine's *Confessions*. See Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 216.

<sup>347</sup> Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 222.

foundation, e.g. the belief that we are created by God who ‘gives’ us our life.<sup>348</sup> Spinoza’s metaphysics offers a different though not incompatible interpretation, in that he invites us to think of gratitude as an acknowledgement of dependence (or more simply of another who has benefited you), and as focusing attention on the object of love.<sup>349</sup> Casals’ practice resembles the gratitude that Wittgenstein’s expressed for his life at its end, for as Gaita again points out, Casals’ does not feel these feelings because his life was an endless succession of joyful mornings, and even if it were this would not adequately account for the form of love being expressed.<sup>350</sup> Casals’ suggestion that ‘age does not necessarily mean getting old’ gives expression to the Spinozistic idea that the person as eternal, i.e. timeless.

The passage overall is a restatement of the idea that ‘life as a whole’, and oneself as a part of that whole, is unconditionally lovable, i.e. ‘Good’. It puts this idea into a concrete form: there is music, wonder, beauty, and work; the world is an amazing miracle that may be continually ‘rediscovered’ and which is a ‘joy’ to be a part of. The mention of ‘work’, if understood as creative and productive activity, corresponds with Spinoza’s ontology of value, as does the idea of finding ‘joy in being a part...’. One might want to ask: ‘a part of what?’, much as I asked of Korsgaard’s conception of humanity, and here the simple answer seems to be a world that is ‘wonderful’ and ‘beautiful’. Yet this beauty is not presented as self-evident, or as simply propositional. Rather it needs to be discovered and ‘absorbed’. This echoes Spinoza’s idea that our adequate ‘knowledge of God-or-Nature’ needs to be cultivated, and that our capacity to delight depends on the manner in which we interact with the world. If we commit ourselves to a form of activity that presents the world as objects, and people as ‘other’, then we will inevitably find life to be limited and dull. If, on the other hand, we commit ourselves to understanding the world and those in it as active, engaging, and as sharing and disclosing our own nature in varying degrees, then we will come to know the world as wholly Good, and oneself as wholly valuable as a part of it.

It may be suggested that Casals’ example is exceptional, and exhibits a kind of enjoyment only accessible to the privileged few who are able to ‘appreciate’ this quality of

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<sup>348</sup> See Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 221. This forms part of the comparison with Augustine. Gaita’s claim is that both Casals and Gaita express the same spirit of gratitude; the same ‘spirit of truth in love’ (a phrase he adopts from Simone Weil). In *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* Gaita compares Casals’ passage with Mozart’s claim that ‘We live in this world to compel ourselves industriously to enlighten one another by means of reasoning and to apply ourselves always to carrying forward the sciences and the arts.’ The idea that gratitude for our life is necessarily tied to religious belief is implied by Wiggins when he associated Mozart’s claim with the idea that ‘there exists a God whose purpose ordains certain specific duties for all men, and appoints particular men to particular roles or vocations.’ (Wiggins, *Needs, Values, and Truth*, 89). In support of this position Gaita points out that Wiggins acknowledges that it would be ‘utterly wrong’ to think that Mozart wasted his life just because we believe that there is no such God. See Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 222.

<sup>349</sup> Ethics, P III, prop. 41 & P IV, prop. 71.

<sup>350</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 219.

art. This is to misunderstand the nature of the connection that is being described. It is not the sophistication or subtlety of the art that generates the enjoyment, but the ‘truth’ that it conveys. The claim here is similar to that made by Simone Weil concerning works of ‘genius’ (and also, according to Gaita, Levi), which was introduced in chapter four. The works of literature that she includes in this category are not distinguished by their cleverness, but by the power to convey the reality of human suffering and human goodness. I suggested earlier that we may struggle to accept this conception of genius because we do not have a shared conception of truth by which it may be assessed. Following Spinoza, we may understand the ‘truth’ of these works by the power that they convey, i.e. through the ‘power of acting’ given to the individual who knows it. This in turn is known by the quality of the affects involved, i.e. through the joy that is generated through this knowledge; joy that is evident in Casals examples, but also in Levi’s example in Auschwitz, when he was struck by the beauty of some passages in Dante: ‘[It is] as if I also was hearing it for the first time: like the blast of a trumpet, like the voice of God. For a moment I forget who I am and where I am’.<sup>351</sup> This is an experience of powerful joy in the midst of great depravation. It is, one might say, fleeting, but it clearly strengthens Levi, i.e. it empowers him to ‘persevere in his being’, such that when he finds he cannot remember certain lines he becomes almost desperate, and thinks that he would ‘give today’s soup’ to remember them. So, rather than a fleeting moment, it is for Levi an experience of eternity; ‘the voice of God’.

In further response to the thought that this truth is somehow exclusive, it should be also noted that this truth is not solely given through the ‘liberal arts’, or indeed through intellectual activity as it is typically conceived. Truth in the examples from Casals and Levi was mediated through music and literature, but for others it takes different forms. Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations convey this ‘spirit of truth’, in their commitment to intellectual integrity and in the conviction that truth cannot be privately accomplished; however difficult he found to relate to others. His dying wish to convey his gratitude for his life to his friends is in part an expression of love for those who have shared in his troubled search. Indeed most people place other people at the centre of their activities, and understand their own worth through the goodness that arises from these relationships. Hence in illness and death they will desire to be close to those who they love. This is clear in a number of the patient’s interviewed by Mount et al, and was powerfully expressed by Anne-Marie. I cited her comments before as a expression of clear purpose, but now – in illustration of Spinoza’s

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<sup>351</sup> Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 225.

analysis of the eternal self – we may attend to the way in which she understands her existence: through her relationship to her children:

“If you look from the outside, [my illness] is a bad experience. But it brought me to another point of view about life, about what’s really important and what is not. About what is the meaning of life, *really*. Why are we here? We are here for a certain period of time. We have some things to do and in my case I think it’s to take care of my children and bring them to adulthood in the safest way.”<sup>352</sup>

The general importance of our connection to others is, I would argue, partly what is behind our interest in the notion of a shared or common ‘humanity’, which Gaita and Korsgaard attempt in very different ways to articulate.<sup>353</sup> Yet as we have seen through the examples we have considered (several of which are taken from Gaita), connection to other people is not the only way that we identify truth. For some it is a connection to a kind of activity (a football club), or to a place (e.g. the sports ground), or to ‘nature’ – the beauty of the world that Casals and Frankl speak of – that constitutes the ‘joy of God’ in their life. In Spinoza’s case, it was probably philosophy itself, integrated with his scientific studies, through which he could know the order and movement of the universe and everything in it.

The examples I have just given are comparatively familiar; there are others that we might consider which are less typical. For instance, a person’s affliction can itself become a source of goodness, if it helps to focus one’s agency. I have heard of a patient being glad after receiving a terminal diagnosis, not because she wanted to die, but because she had felt stuck in unhappy circumstances for a long time, and the diagnosis gave her the impetus and justification for making the radical changes that were necessary for her to begin enjoying her life again.<sup>354</sup> A similarly surprising perspective is expressed by another participant from Mount’s study: ‘...One of the gifts of the [cancer] experience is this feeling of connectedness. And some of my strongest feelings have been when I am suffering physically – then I feel the connectedness.’<sup>355</sup> Strange as it is to say, it seems that in these examples the person’s loss and pain are helping her towards a more adequate understanding of herself in relation to that which gives her life (God-or-Nature).

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<sup>352</sup> Mount, Boston and Cohen, ‘Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being’, 378.

<sup>353</sup> Both talk of humanity, but their methods of defining it are very different. Korsgaard, influenced by Kant, argues for what must be universally true of human beings, and attempt to build from there. Gaita, influenced by Wittgensteinians, starts with examples that seems to him definitive expressions of ‘humanity’, and attempts to hold them together as a unified account (I would not say he derives a general definition, unless it is under his conception of ‘Good and Evil’).

<sup>354</sup> I thank Rod MacLeod for this example.

<sup>355</sup> Mount, Boston and Cohen, ‘Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being’, 381.

Beside these individual examples, there are also the various cultural and religious practices that are designed to help people to fix their attention of an object of inspiration. Prayer, meditation, and worship practices could all be interpreted on Spinozistic grounds as techniques that help a person to move her attention from her own relative weakness and isolation, i.e. from ‘self-reference’, to some other agency that is regarded as ‘sacred’, revered, or simply admired, i.e. ‘reference to God’. These practices are, on Spinozistic analysis, useful (and to that extent ‘true’) in so far as they are genuinely inspiring, i.e. in so far as they enable the person to actualise her nature. To the extent that they do this they will help a person to restore wholeness.<sup>356</sup>

### 6.6.3 Example three

My third example is taken from William Styron’s memoir of his struggle with chronic severe depression. William Styron was an acclaimed novelist and essayist, perhaps best known for the 1979 novel *Sophie’s Choice*. The memoir begins with Styron’s narrative of his trip to Paris in 1985 to receive the prestigious *Prix mondial Cino Del Duca* literary prize. Styron describes his feelings of anxiety, dread and self-loathing; his numbness to pleasure, the difficulty and pain of social interaction, all at a time when he was receiving the acknowledgement of distinguished colleagues for his life’s achievement, and – moreover – a \$25,000 prize check (which he somehow misplaced while attending a dinner in his honour). Through the memoir Styron discusses the nature of depression, the ways that it is often misunderstood, his interactions with healthcare professionals, the friends he had known who had struggled with the illness and then committed suicide, and his own suicidal ideation. The following passage describes his transition from a state of absolute despair to a state whereby he could voluntarily admit himself for hospital treatment:

‘Late one bitterly cold night, when I knew that I could not possibly get myself through the following day, I sat in the living room of the house bundled up against the chill; something had happened to the furnace. My wife had gone to bed, and I had forced myself to watch the tape of a movie in which a young actress, who had been in a play of mine, was cast in a small part. At one point in the film, which was set in late-

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<sup>356</sup> The relationship between Spinoza’s philosophy and religion is complex and interesting, and is an issue that Spinoza himself gave much thought to. See for example *Ethics*, P IV, prop. 68. I will not pursue the matter any further here, though I acknowledge that a simple minded assimilation of religious practice to Spinoza’s ethics, such as I have proposed here, would be unacceptable to many who espouse those practices, and the associated doctrine.

nineteenth-century Boston, the characters moved down the hallway of a music conservatory, beyond the walls of which, from unseen musicians, came a contralto voice, a sudden soaring passage from the Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*.

This sound, which like all music – indeed, like all pleasure – I had been numbly unresponsive to for months, pierced my heart like a dagger, and in a flood of swift recollection I thought of all the joys the house had known: the children who had rushed through its rooms, the festivals, the love and work, the honestly earned slumber, the voices and the nimble commotion, the perennial tribe of cats and dogs and birds, “laughter and ability and Sighing, / And Frocks and Curls.” All this I realized was more than I could ever abandon, even as what I had set out so deliberately to do was more than I could inflict on those memories, and upon those, so close to me, with whom the memories were bound. And just as powerfully I realized I could not commit this desecration on myself. I drew upon some last gleam of sanity to perceive the terrifying dimensions of the mortal predicament I had fallen into. I woke up my wife and soon telephone calls were made. The next day I was admitted to the hospital.<sup>357</sup>

There is much that is of interest in this passage, and much that correlates with Spinoza’s understanding of the mind. To begin with there is depression itself, which is experienced as a complete absence of joy and an almost complete inability to act. This supports Spinoza’s basic psychology. We may then consider the thought of suicide. Rationally this is conceived as a means of avoiding pain, and yet it is an act that requires more power than Styron can muster.<sup>358</sup> As a person suffering great pain Styron seems to fit within the first category of suicide that Korsgaard described (i.e. the rational suicide), and yet this can hardly be characterised as a ‘reasoned’ and ‘deliberate’ free choice.<sup>359</sup> We may then think that this belongs in the second category that Korsgaard describes: suicide as a kind of ‘betrayal’, and indeed the way that Styron comes to perceive it seems to support this reading. Yet this again implies that there is some choice involved. I noted when I outlined Korsgaard’s two categories of suicide that it was not clear how the two categories were distinguished, and I think this example illustrates why. The confusion arises because we are unsure how to characterise Styron’s freedom and its relationship to his evidently ‘overwhelming’ pain. Suicide is not either rational or irrational, as people are not either rational or irrational. Styron

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<sup>357</sup> Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 65-7.

<sup>358</sup> He describes trying to write a suicide note and finding it impossible to form words of any eloquence or dignity. Styron is of course an excellent writer. Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 65.

<sup>359</sup> See pages 78-9.

is still capable of reasoning, but he is not ‘free’ as in undetermined. He is not able to ‘stand apart’ from his situation and reflect on what he should do, as per the Kantian conception of autonomy. Following Spinoza’s account of the mind, we should rather say that a person is more-or-less free to act according to how well she understands the forces that are operative in her body, and is able to use those forces to achieve a kind of harmony with her whole life situation.<sup>360</sup> Styron’s body was composed in a discordant and disordered way, and thus his thoughts worked against each other, such that every thought took on a feeling of intense sadness, and further suppressed his power. However – and this is the main point of interest in regards my current discussion – in the passage he describes how a new kind of thought arose in him as he perceived a part of his life in unity. This restoration of knowledge was not ‘freely chosen’ but was enabled through the affect that come about as he heard a particular piece of music. This initiated a process of unfolding awareness whereby he came to see his life as something of irrevocable valuable, despite all the pain he had endured (and, one might add, the pain and grief he had explored in his novels).

Styron’s description of the resolution he came to is particularly striking in the light of Spinoza’s relational account of the individual. The joy that he perceives in his own life is a life he has had with others. They were the joys that ‘the house had known’. Thus, he perceived that he could not abandon his own memories, but nor could he abandon those with whom the memories were ‘bound’. Even the thought which prompted him to watch the tape was formed from a connection he had to another (the young actress who had been in one of his plays). All of this correlates with Spinoza’s idea that the individual is only active when in community. Styron could not regard his death as simply a matter of private decision, as everything that he does, including his act in dying, is affected by and affects others. Thus, the value that he places on his life is not a value that is separable or distinct: it is a value that belongs to others as it belongs to him.

We may further observe that it is not the extension of his ‘life’ that is of fundamental concern (the extension of durational existence). The life of William Styron has a ‘natural’ end. The issue here is how we understand his nature, and implicit in Styron’s response to these memories, as it is entailed in Spinoza’s ontology, is the idea that suicide is not natural (at least not the suicide Styron was contemplating). This would not have been an act expressive of the whole; it would rather have undermined the whole.<sup>361</sup> To commit suicide

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<sup>360</sup> ‘The truth shall set you free.’

<sup>361</sup> As I have argued previously, it is difficult to make sense of these remarks if we conceive the body as a bounded entity over which the person (or mind) occupying that body has absolute dominion; especially if that person’s dominion is thought to be exercised through her private rational evaluations. Korsgaard, as I noted in

would be, Styron realised, a ‘desecration’ of himself; his body, which is not simply ‘his body’, but a body that has been an essential part of something that he can now perceive to be good. The very notion that the body may be desecrated is interesting as it implies a notion of holiness or divinity in our individual being, a notion that Spinoza affirms in his characterisation of eternal being as Divine (‘God-or-Nature’). Granted there were multiple reasons for why he used this terminology, as I noted in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, I think it reasonable to say that Spinoza, even if allowed genuine freedom of expression, would support the view that a human life, and a human body, as a unique determination of the infinite indeterminate primordial potency, multiply interactive with other such determinations, is ‘sacred’.

In this passage Styron is describing a moment of revelation in which he came to know his ‘true’ nature, and was thereby empowered to act in a way that ultimately unites his death with his life. I must stress that I am not putting this interpretation forward as a ‘method’ for treating depression. On the contrary, the example illustrates the complex and highly individualised composition of a person’s nature.<sup>362</sup> Nor am I implying that this knowledge led to an immediate recovery. In the memoir Styron goes on to describe his seven week stay in a hospital, which he calls ‘a purgatory’.<sup>363</sup> My purpose here is to illustrate Spinoza’s idea that a person’s agency is powered by adequate knowledge of his or her nature. I am claiming that in this passage Styron is describing an advent of such knowledge.

There is one final aspect of this passage that I wish to mention so as to illustrate my claim. Through his memoir Styron offers his understanding of the factors involved in his depression, and hence of the ‘affects’ compromising his particular melancholia. He links the onset of his depression to the time when he stopped his lifelong habit of drinking because his body suddenly became intolerant of alcohol, and argues that his condition was probably made worse by his psychiatrist’s careless administration of ‘Halcion’, which is a tranquilising drug. He also mentions unresolved grief (or incomplete mourning) as a possible precursor to depression, and says he is persuaded that this was a significant factor in his case as his mother died when he was aged 13.<sup>364</sup> This provides a partial explanation of why hearing the passage from the Brahms *Alto Rhapsody* affected him as it did:

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chapter three, moved towards a shared conception of value, but was, in my view, unable to develop it due to the limitations of her ontological framework.

<sup>362</sup> ‘Depression is much too complex in its cause, its symptoms and its treatment for unqualified conclusions to be drawn from the experience of a single individual’. Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 33.

<sup>363</sup> Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 70.

<sup>364</sup> Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 80. Styron credits this idea to Howard I. Kushner’s historical work, *Self Destruction in the Promised Land*.

‘.. if this theory of incomplete mourning has validity, and I think it does, and if it is also true that in the nethermost depths of one’s suicidal behaviour one is still subconsciously dealing with immense loss while trying to surmount all the effects of its devastation, then my own avoidance of death may have been belated homage to my mother. I do know that in those last hours before I rescued myself, when I listened to the passage from the *Alto Rhapsody* – which I’d heard her sing – she had been very much on my mind.’<sup>365</sup>

On a Spinozistic reading (perhaps moderated by Freud), we might say that his regard for and loss of his mother was a significant part of his nature that he needed to ‘come to terms with’ (i.e. integrate with the rest of his life), and in his resolve to become well he was doing this (it was ‘belated homage’ to his mother). The association of this music with the thought of his mother certainly had a profound affect on him, and this suggests they were critically placed in the composition of his mind.

## 6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have expanded the Spinozistic ontology of personal wholeness and drawn out certain ethical implications that are relevant to the question of how a person is more or less whole. According to this ontology a person becomes whole through ‘perfect response’ to his ‘complement in nature’, the ‘environment of persons and things’ in which he has his being. Perfect response means being related to others in ways that enable one to actualise one’s potential. I have discussed this conception in relation to the concepts of meaning, purpose and connection, which are current in discussions of the nature of suffering and our response to it. The three examples I have discussed present different ways of being related to others. I have suggested that the football example shows a mind that seems to be in ‘lesser part’ eternal, because the individual is rendered more passive by his connections to others, and hence more prone to sadness, and to all the forms of vice that follow from it. By contrast, Cassals’ example presents a way of relating to the world that adapts his body to his environment so that its ‘greater part’ is perfectly active. He is able to express who he is, and affirm the worth of his existence, through his creative response to the delight he takes in his world. The example from Styron presents a mind that is maladapted, such that the person is afflicted by intense pathological sadness. His moment of rescue comes when he finds

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<sup>365</sup> Styron, *Darkness Visible*, 81.

strength through adequate knowledge of his own nature, i.e. through seeing how his life has been good, and how he can live in the strength of this goodness by acting in faithfulness to it, and thereby move towards health and wholeness.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

On his death bed Wittgenstein said that he had had a wonderful life. This is striking because Wittgenstein's life was marked by suffering. It illustrates how a person may consider her life worthwhile despite her living through considerable pain and sadness. In this thesis I have developed an account of how a person's life can be regarded as a 'whole' in order to understand this relationship between the value of a person's life and her suffering. The account I have given is based on a metaphysical analysis of the human condition. On this analysis we are finite agents interacting with a 'complement in nature'. We are whole in so far as we are able to actualise the unity of our being in the seamless community of infinite eternal reality. We suffer as we are obstructed in this actualisation. To overcome our suffering we must understand ourselves under a 'species of eternity'. This understanding stems from an adequate understanding of one's nature in relation to one's complement in nature. This is the person as the adequate cause of her actions; it is her as a unique expression of Divine agency. A person becomes active, and so acquires this knowledge, as she adapts her body to her complement, i.e. as she acts in creative community. To know oneself in this way is to regard one's life as valuable. If this is correct then Wittgenstein was able to describe his life as wonderful because he knew it to be an integrated and free response to the world as he encountered it.

Any attempt to describe the integrity of an individual life must be qualified by our natural epistemic limitations. Any description of an individual life will fall short of the actuality of that person as all descriptions are merely designations of properties the individual has in common with others. It is only those who have shared their lives with another person that can truly claim knowledge of who she is. I am not in a position to give an adequate account of who Wittgenstein was, and so I cannot say definitively what it was about his life that was integrated and free. Speculating on the basis of what I do know, and from the general principles that have been established, I would say that the integrity of his agency is related to the honesty with which he undertook his philosophical work: his dedication to the truth as he grasped it, and his refusal to accept anything false, superficial or trite. Moreover, one can see evidence in his life of the sorts of connections necessary to form this kind of integrated response. Though a difficult friend he was aware of how he had been upheld and supported in his endeavours. Though he found social interaction to be difficult he did not become resentful or bitter towards people. He acknowledged, even if only implicitly,

Spinoza's dictum that 'the best thing for a good person is another good person'. This is reflected in the fact that his dying remark was a message to his friends. One might also consider his remark in 6:45 of the *Tractatus*: 'The contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling'.<sup>366</sup> The sense that the world (i.e. reality) thought of in itself (sub specie aeterni) is the thought of a 'limited whole', and that this thought is a 'mystical *feeling*', seems to align with Spinoza's idea that we have intuitive knowledge of our eternal nature, but that our knowledge of eternity is necessarily limited, as our own nature is necessarily limited.<sup>367</sup> Perhaps this notion of the 'mystical' may be linked with his sense of his life as wonderful. I would argue that this link suggests a Spinozistic sensitivity in Wittgenstein outlook, if we interpret the mystical feeling as a form of enjoyment of life itself, congruent with Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, and to be contrasted with the transient forms of personal satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) that involve the inadequate conception of one's existence as an independent whole (sub specie durationis).

Ivan Ilych was my example of a person who did not value his life as a whole. We can now say that he did not value his life as a whole because his life was not a unified response to the world as he encountered it. His life has been absorbed by the overwhelming importance of his own survival and persistence rather than being grounded on an acceptance of his mortality and dependence. His mind was in 'greater part' comprised of durational concerns, and hence he was not free to actualise his nature; to enjoy who he was. Though he had benefited materially from the socio-economic system that he worked in, he had not perceived this as opportunity to adapt his body so that it is 'capable of a great many things'. If he had, he might have learned to be grateful, and this feeling of love may have empowered him to a greater level of freedom. Instead, he had moved passively through his life, accepting at each turn the 'lesser good' and neglecting the 'greater', viz. the potential that was in him to actualise an irreplaceable aspect of eternal reality. In his sickness Ilych became conscious of how he had neglected his family and how little he had shared with them. There was only one person, Gerasim, who could comfort him, and he was one of his servants. Gerasim could care for Ilych because he adequately understood his nature in a way that Ilych himself did not (i.e. his nature as finite and vulnerable). Through this knowledge Gerasim could direct his desire toward a goal that strengthened his own agency: he desired to help a fellow creature to show that it is possible for people to care for each other as they are suffering (thus he strengthened

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<sup>366</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, section 6.45.

<sup>367</sup> More careful discussion would be required for a thoroughgoing comparison of this notion of 'feeling the world as a limited whole' with Spinoza's philosophy. I mentioned the connection because it seems to me a fruitful line of investigation (I thank James Nelson for directing me to it).

the thought that he would be helped in this way when he himself was dying).<sup>368</sup> Ilych had not developed such an understanding, and though he could see the goodness in it when it was demonstrated to him, it seems there was not enough power left in him to form an adequate response (though perhaps he attempted this with his incomplete apology).

On Spinozistic analysis, the difference between *perceiving* oneself to be whole, as per Cassell's definition of suffering, and *being* whole, as per his definition of healing, is a matter of the perfection of one's self knowledge. The perception of a transition in one's power of acting (the affects of joy or sadness) always implies a perception of weakness, i.e. a sense of incompleteness, and therefore some lack of knowledge regarding one's nature.<sup>369</sup> Genuine wholeness, as opposed to perceived wholeness, is the condition of perfect agency in which we feel completeness, or bliss. The perception of a transition in one's power of acting is useful in so far as it stems from and leads to adequate knowledge, i.e. in so far as it brings us to a more perfect understanding of our nature.<sup>370</sup> Suffering can be good if it leads to adequate knowledge, and equally joy can be bad if leads to inadequate knowledge.<sup>371</sup> We are all capable of being deluded as to our actual status in relation to our complement in nature, and we are all limited in our ability to know our nature perfectly. The more one acquires adequate knowledge, the more one is able to act in perfect reciprocity, and hence the more one is able to *be* whole.

To express gratitude for one's life 'considered as a certain kind of whole' – as per Gaita's interpretation of Wittgenstein's remark – is not to *perceive* wholeness but to institute wholeness through an effort of the mind. Thus, such an expression is not, as Gaita said, an evaluation, i.e. an idea of oneself, but rather a self-constituting act. Nor does it require a notion of a Divine giver to whom one is grateful. On the Spinozistic view, adequate knowledge involves recognition of one's ontological dependence on others. Our lives are 'given' in the sense that we did not create them of our own power (though we are active participants), and the good that we realise is never wholly self-generated, and so it does make sense to be grateful for 'life'. Generally speaking, gratitude as a practise of attending to what is good and not dwelling on what is 'wrong' is a way of unify one's mind.<sup>372</sup> In

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<sup>368</sup> See note 179 on page 91.

<sup>369</sup> Compare Ethics, P IV, prop. 64. 'If the human mind had only adequate ideas, it would form no notion of evil'.

<sup>370</sup> Eichmann, for example, may have felt a sense of joy in the winged words of Nazi rhetoric (as used in his final speech), but this perceived increase in his power is so at odds with his reality (in the totalitarian state he is greatly weakened) that it cannot be thought of as indicating wholeness. The feeling of joy implies a move toward wholeness, but the inadequacy of this thought becomes manifest as soon as he attempts act on it. Hence his professed inability to 'enjoy' his work (see Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 83-4).

<sup>371</sup> Ethics, P IV, props. 43 & 44.

<sup>372</sup> Ethics, P III, props. 25, 53 & 54.

contemplating what we are, and what we love, we strengthen our awareness of our power (we realise value). As a conscious *act* of the mind this is a condition of actual unity (as opposed to merely perceived unity). It is a state of wholeness if it is grounded on adequate knowledge, and this may have been the situation for Wittgenstein. If one is aware that death is imminent, and that there is nothing more that one can do, then thinking on the value that has been realised in one's life (value that is eternal as a part of God-or-Nature) may indeed constitute wholeness. This knowledge may even convey a sense of fittingness to one's passing.

There is no single technique by which a person may acquire knowledge of her own nature or that of other people. Every individual must respond to the unique circumstances of his or her life and learn how to actualise his or her particular nature. This is, moreover, not a question that can be finally answered in words because it concerns the enjoyment of being as it is for individual agents, and such knowledge belongs only to those individuals and God, in whom they have their being. However, Spinoza's epistemology describes certain ways that knowledge is typically developed. It is, firstly, through the quality of her affects that a person comes to know herself. In the enjoyment of her agency the individual has knowledge of herself as the free and immanent cause of her activities. As just noted, the free expression of our agency is our participation in the perfect freedom of eternal reality; this is the human mind *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>373</sup> We extend this knowledge as we join our agency with others, i.e. as we participate in creative community. These connections are facilitated by our capacity to exchange meanings, which convey to us the properties that our individual 'natures' have in common and thus allow us to form associations conducive to the collective enjoyment of our cooperative powers. Through bonds of mutual respect and friendship we are made more secure in our enjoyment of eternal being.

In describing the condition of the human mind in relation to our finite bodies Spinoza helps us to understand why it is so difficult for many people to attain wholeness. With this understanding we should be cautious about overly optimistic declarations about the power of the human mind to endure suffering. Spinoza's philosophy describes both our powers and our limits. People are not simply free to choose how they respond to their circumstances (*pace* Frankl). They are free to choose in so far as their minds are capable of choosing. There is always some kind of choice that is possible, and so some measure of freedom, but the choices and thus the freedom are always limited. Choosing to watch the movie was perhaps all Styron was capable of at the start of the passage that I discussed. More choices became available to him as the power of his mind increased. This means that a person's capacity for

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<sup>373</sup> God 'loves himself with an infinite love' (Ethics, P V, prop. 35), and as we act freely we know the love of God in our own life (Ethics, P V, prop. 36).

wholeness is limited and in many ways dependent on how she is affected by others. Yet there is much that we can do collectively to strengthen each other, so that each is affirmed in his or her self worth, which in turn makes wholeness more generally attainable. This should be a central concern of all social institutions, legislation and ethical discussion, and especially those institutions that are concerned with health (i.e. wholeness).

The philosophical problem of freewill has not been given close attention in this thesis. The bedrock of the view I have developed is that everything in existence is an agent capable of certain kinds of actions. Action that is *predetermined*, i.e. outside of the control of the agent, is no real action. I am aware that this does not explain why some choose to be less than they are capable of being – i.e. why some act against their nature – and I am not sure that Spinoza’s philosophy answers this question. In other words, I do not see that Spinoza explains why someone ‘knowing the good’ would ‘choose the lesser’; but then perhaps this is inherently unexplainable given the logic of agency. His model does however richly describe the factors involved in our *capacity* for choices (the relative adequacy of our knowledge, and the various ways that we are affected as composite beings), and I am convinced that this model is preferable to the Kantian model which is most often used, whereby a freewill is an ‘undetermined’ will set apart from all that is ‘determined’.<sup>374</sup> Rather than simply characterising freedom as a matter of either/or, such that we are either free or not free, and either choose or do not choose, Spinoza’s model allows us to characterise the relative degrees of freedom that are experienced in our everyday decisions, and the ways that we are aided or obstructed in developing our freedom. It does not leave the agent in an existential void, but presents to her a doctrine of liberation. These matters and their broad philosophical implications have been and continue to be discussed elsewhere.<sup>375</sup> It would be worth extending this discussion to the arena of bioethics, especially as the concept of *autonomy* is so widely used in bioethical discussions. This would undercut models based on preference, or models based straightforwardly on reasons, and provide instead a model of autonomy that incorporates the patient’s relationship to the context in which she must act. According to this model a patient cannot be truly free, i.e. autonomous, without adequate knowledge of her situation, and this is something that a healthcare professional can assist her in developing. At the same time this model would recommend a strongly non-paternalistic policy, for on Spinozistic analysis one can only successfully engage the power of another agent by respecting her nature. If the goal is to help another person, then disregarding or overriding

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<sup>374</sup> An undetermined action as an *uncaused* action is incoherent according to Spinozistic principles. Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza*, 148.

<sup>375</sup> See for example Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, chapters 2 & 3.

her choices, however ill-informed, is more often than not counter-productive. Spinoza's analysis of freedom could also be usefully applied to contemporary neuroscience, both to develop its ethical applications and to assist in the interpretation of the rapidly accumulating data.<sup>376</sup>

This thesis has also given very little attention to the specific institutions or practices that can promote wholeness and alleviate suffering, of which 'healthcare' institutions and practices (such as medicine) are a significant part. Beside the value of autonomy just mentioned, Spinoza's analysis of value could usefully inform the medical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. From this analysis one could develop a conception of benefit that is centred on the person as an agent, with eternal qualities that she endeavours to actualise so as to realise value in her life. This conception would challenge future orientated conceptions of benefit, or 'preference' based conceptions, or conceptions based solely in the feelings or material situation of the agent, while acknowledging that each of these have an element of truth. A true 'benefit', on the Spinozistic view, is that which increases a patient's knowledge of her nature, or otherwise increases her ability to actualise that nature. Harm, on the other hand, is anything that obscures her understanding of this nature, or which leads to an overall reduction of her ability to express it.

Spinoza's ontology clearly supports the values of dignity, respect and trust, which many have identified as fundamental to a 'good' doctor-patient relationship. It could be used to clarify the concept of dignity, which tends to be dominated by post-Kantian perspectives that focus on the 'humanity' of the person (a vague universal property), or a person's capacity for rational self-determination. On the Spinozistic account, dignity is located in the agency of the individual, which is in turn related to her 'place' within a mesh of activity (familial, societal, and environmental). Thus, the individual must be respected in order that she can be who she is, and not simply because she 'possesses' certain capacities or certain rights, but as an irreplaceable part of a shared system of values. And these shared values cannot be realised without cooperation, i.e. trust. Clarity and agreement could also be brought to the burgeoning research into the nature of 'spirituality' and its relationship to health, as the Spinozistic conception of wholeness incorporates many of the concepts that are included in definitions of 'spirituality',<sup>377</sup> and offer points of intersection between traditional theologies and secular humanism.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has begun this work in *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Harcourt: USA; 2003), though his discussions tend to be more concerned with the characterisation of thought than with ethically related issues such as freedom of the will.

<sup>377</sup> A recent 'consensus conference' of palliative care specialists produced the following definition of spirituality: 'Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning

A Spinozistic contribution to the literature on caring could be especially useful, as this is an area of thought that has been particularly stymied by the Humean-Kantian dichotomy of thought and feeling.<sup>379</sup> In this contribution one could re-conceive ‘caring’ as a form of knowledge grounded both in the reasoning of the carer but also in her intuitive knowledge of her and her patient’s shared nature.<sup>380</sup> Also of interest would be Spinoza’s breakdown of the distinction between ‘moral’, ‘other’ regarding value and ‘non-moral’, ‘self-regarding’ values, through his basic ethical claim that helping others helps ourselves. This would challenge the prevailing model which tends to conceive caring as helping the patient/client while ‘draining’ the carer. Spinoza’s analysis of sympathy and pity would be applicable to this discussion, as would his broad understanding of the ways that a person is affected in interacting with suffering.

These latter topics have not been covered in this thesis because they go beyond the primary goal, and require more time, space and power than has been available. The primary goal was to understand how a person could be whole or not whole, in order that we understand the relationship between a person’s suffering and the value she places on her life. In my view these questions are fundamental to our thinking about ethics and health, and by addressing them we have established a strong and broad foundation for future study.

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and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred’. Puchalski et al, ‘Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference’, 887.

<sup>378</sup> This claim would need to be developed further; the basic thought is that by working through the implications of Spinoza’s ontology we may find that the disagreements between the ‘religious’ and the ‘non-religious’ (or spiritual and non-spiritual) are not as radical we sometimes think.

<sup>379</sup> For an attempt to rehabilitate Kant’s ethics from this dichotomy while remaining faithful to Kantian metaphysics see John Paley, ‘The Virtues of autonomy: The Kantian ethics of care’, 133-43. Paley seeks to address traditional Humean inspired criticisms of Kant’s ethics using Neo-Kantian arguments, but in my view does not address the fundamental difficulties discussed in this thesis.

<sup>380</sup> A compatible view, not informed by a Spinozistic framework, has been put forward by Jansen, MacLeod, and Walker, ‘Recognition, reflection, and role models: Critical elements in education about care in medicine’, 389-395.

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