

Ethics in a Realistic Spirit

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Abstract

Cora Diamond has suggested that philosophers should approach ethics in a realistic spirit. This thesis is an attempt to explain what this might mean. The realistic spirit is Diamond's distinctive take on realism, derived from her reading of Wittgenstein. Chapter 1 provides a detailed study of Diamond's account of the realistic spirit, identifying three central features: the realistic spirit 1) moves beyond the traditional opposition between realism and anti-realism, 2) is a fantasy-avoiding spirit with a perfectionist dimension and 3) is not distinctively philosophical. In Chapters 2-5 I assess how the realistic spirit thus understood might be brought to bear on ethics by exploring the moral philosophies of Diamond (Chapter 2), Sophie Grace Chappell (Chapter 3) and Charles Taylor (Chapters 4 and 5). These chapters make the case that each respective project exemplifies features of the realistic spirit, but that the three projects are not equally successful in their attempts to live up to this spirit. Chappell's ethics ultimately falls back on the realist/anti-realist dichotomy, thereby failing to meet one of the criteria for the realistic spirit. Diamond's and Taylor's projects both meet the criteria, but in very different ways: Taylor attempts to exemplify the realistic spirit by articulating a positive account of ethics, while Diamond attempts to exemplify the realistic spirit by limiting her ethics to criticism. In Chapter 6, this tension is overcome by exploring Taylor and Diamond's shared roots in Wittgenstein. It is shown that the realistic spirit is internally coherent despite manifesting in radically different forms.

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Introduction

Cora Diamond is a renowned and elusive moral philosopher, who has written influentially about a variety of topics including animal ethics, concept loss, the relation between moral philosophy and literature, truth, theism, abolitionism, moralism, thought experiments, and many more. Diamond's writings cover an enormously diverse landscape, often reaching beyond the purview of what is traditionally classified as philosophy in discussing literature, history, Christian apologetics and newspaper articles, as well as various works of non-fiction. They also take an unusual form, normally consisting of various interwoven strands involving criticism of other authors and collections of pertinent examples, often moving seamlessly from discussion of one topic to the next and back.

Diamond's work is held together by what she calls 'the realistic spirit'. It is my project in this thesis to explain what this spirit is and how it bears on ethics. Diamond characterizes the realistic spirit in a programmatic article, 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit', which traces the spirit's roots back to Wittgenstein.¹ I explain this article in Chapter 1, extrapolating three criterial features: The realistic spirit 1) moves beyond the traditional opposition between realism and anti-realism, 2) is a fantasy-avoiding spirit with a perfectionist dimension and 3) is not distinctively philosophical. Chapters 2-5 assess how the realistic spirit thus understood might be brought to bear on ethics by exploring the moral philosophies of Diamond (Chapter 2), Sophie Grace Chappell (Chapter 3) and Charles Taylor (Chapters 4 and 5). These three philosophies take very different forms:

¹ Diamond (1991a).

Diamond's ethics is developed in occasional articles which assemble diverse examples of moral thinking in an attempt to undermine philosophical positions which involve pseudo-explanations (or, to use the Diamondian term, fantasies). Chappell's ethics is presented in a nine-point realist manifesto, supported by a criticism of contemporary moral theorizing and a phenomenological study of epiphanic experience. Taylor's ethics is developed in historical narratives of over 500 pages, which attempt to articulate the historical backgrounds against which our contemporary moral judgments make sense, in order to reconnect us with deep 'moral sources' that are in danger of becoming obscured in modernity. It is a striking feature of the realistic spirit that it can have application across such a diverse body of philosophical work.

Each of the three moral philosophical projects under investigation in this thesis brings into focus crucial aspects of what it might mean to be realistic in one's approach to ethics, while also involving some tensions:

1. Diamond suggests that to be realistic in ethics means acknowledging that ethics lacks a subject-matter. She attacks moral realism in writers such as Sabina Lovibond, suggesting that it is a philosophical fantasy to think that ethics is *about* something. However, she fails to explain what she in turn means by ethics, leaving the nature of her no-subject-matter claim somewhat indeterminate.

2. Chappell suggests that to be realistic in ethics means paying attention to moral phenomenology. She attacks contemporary systematic moral theorizing, suggesting that it is a philosophical fantasy to think that it is possible to construct a moral theory

without relying on phenomenology. However, her own proposed account of moral phenomenology seems to be vitiated by the same philosophical fantasy as Lovibondian realism.

3. Taylor suggests that to be realistic in ethics means articulating the background against which our moral commitments are intelligible. He criticizes reductionist naturalism, suggesting that it is a philosophical fantasy to think that one can do away with background ontologies. However, though conceived as a dialogical endeavour, Taylor's articulation of background ontologies fails to elicit a response from the reductionist naturalists with whom the dialogue was supposed to unfold.

I suggest that Chappell's project fails as an attempt to approach ethics in a realistic spirit because of its overly simplistic commitment to a conventional moral realism. Diamond's and Taylor's projects, however, despite their internal difficulties, successfully exhibit the two crucial features of the realistic spirit: they 1) move beyond the dichotomy between realism and anti-realism and 2) strive to avoid fantasy. Given the apparent tension between their projects, these important similarities are intriguing. Taylor attempts to be realistic by articulating backgrounds, whereas Diamond attempts to be realistic by deliberately *avoiding* articulating positive conceptions of ethics, instead confining herself to criticism. In Chapter 6, I show that this tension is related to the difficulties internal to Taylor's and Diamond's approaches. I suggest that the difficulties can be overcome and the tension resolved by tracing how Diamond and Taylor come to prioritize different aspects of their shared Wittgensteinian inheritance.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Realistic Spirit

This chapter provides a general exposition of Diamond's realistic spirit as the concept is introduced in her paper 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit'.² After a brief introduction, I provide a summary of Diamond's paper (Section 1) and then go on to extrapolate three claims from Diamond's discussion (Section 2), which form the basis for my account of the realistic spirit in ethics in ensuing chapters. The claims are that the realistic spirit moves beyond the conventional philosophical opposition between realism and anti-realism, that it has a perfectionist dimension as a fantasy-avoiding spirit of self-criticism, and that it is not distinctively philosophical. My ultimate purpose is to show how, together, these three claims enable a characterization of the realistic spirit which might be fruitfully deployed in ethics (Section 3). In this chapter the focus is on the preliminary step of showing how the three claims emerge from Diamond's original discussion of the realistic spirit.

Being the paper in which Diamond first developed the concept of a realistic spirit, 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' is the main text under discussion in this chapter. It is a 34-page article, which professes to have two related aims:

- 1) To give an account of Wittgenstein's remark: 'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing.'³
- 2) To give a critical response to Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as providing sceptical solutions to sceptical problems.

² Diamond (1991a).

³ Diamond (1991a: 39). The remark is from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein (1978: 325).

The connection between these two aims is that Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein leans heavily towards anti-realism, which stands in tension with Wittgenstein's claim to be aiming for realism in philosophy. The realistic spirit emerges as Diamond's answer to the underlying question what Wittgenstein means by realism in philosophy.⁴

What one might expect from such an article is an account of Wittgenstein's remark, detailing what he means by realism, an account of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein, highlighting how Kripke's Wittgenstein is an anti-realist, a discussion of the ensuing tension between Kripke's and Diamond's readings of Wittgenstein, a proposed resolution, and, finally, an account of how the realism which Diamond finds in Wittgenstein can be brought to bear on philosophy more generally. Instead, Diamond begins with an account of various extra-philosophical uses of the idea of being 'realistic', including an extensive discussion of the 19th-century realist novel; goes on to discuss the relation between realism and empiricism in the writings of Ramsey, particularly his critique of C.S. Peirce; writes extensively about Berkeley's criticism of Locke; and spends several pages on mediaeval hagiography – all the while making various interspersed comments about Wittgenstein's philosophical method, which condensate into a somewhat more unified account only towards the very end of the paper. Diamond interweaves the different strands of the paper, occasionally returning to an example from literary criticism, or reaching forward to make a point about Ramsey or Wittgenstein, while primarily dealing with a different thread of the discussion. After the

⁴ Diamond (1991a: 39).

first paragraph, Kripke is not mentioned again, and a footnote indicates that the paper was written before Diamond became familiar with Kripke's work on Wittgenstein.

The structure of Diamond's paper is highly unusual, which has to do with the fact that the realistic spirit is a *spirit*. As such, it is characterized by certain operations, by a general thrust, maybe by a web of resemblances, but not by a particular set of doctrines. One might say that it is not defined by a particular subject matter. The difficulty Diamond faces is that she has to give an account of the realistic spirit without reducing it to a particular doctrine. She achieves this by showing the spirit at work; that is, by showing how the spirit is made manifest in the thinking of other writers, and by attempting to give her own writing a form which exemplifies the spirit. To this end, Diamond's paper skips from one example to another, indicating how the realistic spirit is exemplified in Ramsey, Berkeley and Wittgenstein, but also in the realist novel, in the response a modern reader might have to medieval hagiography, and in Diamond's own response to anti-realist readings of Wittgenstein. These examples are very much interwoven in Diamond's discussion, following Wittgenstein's idea that the nature of philosophical investigation 'compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction.'⁵

In my summary of Diamond's paper in Section 1, I gloss over some of the ramified connections in Diamond's discussion, occasionally presenting her work in a more linear fashion than she does, in order to pave the way for my explanation of the three central

⁵ See Wittgenstein (1953: ix). Diamond discusses this important remark of Wittgenstein's in 'Criss-Cross Philosophy', where she argues that Wittgenstein's later philosophy operates with a very particular kind of 'piecemeal' conception of clarification, which goes together with Wittgenstein's realistic spirit.

features of the realistic spirit (overcoming realism and anti-realism, avoiding fantasy through (self-)criticism, applicability beyond philosophy) in Section 2. The summary in Section 1 explains how Diamond derives the concept of a realistic spirit from outside philosophy and then shows this spirit at work as a fantasy-avoiding spirit in various critical exchanges, which move beyond the conventional distinction between realism and anti-realism. Section 2 then discusses each of these features in turn, filling in some further details concerning Diamond's paper, which the summary had to omit. Section 3 begins to make connections with ethics.

1. 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' – A Sketch of the Landscape

'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing.'⁶

Diamond's paper gets its impetus from this Wittgensteinian remark. The remark suggests that realism in philosophy is something that is difficult to achieve, and that empiricism makes a failed attempt to achieve it. Diamond explicates the connection between these two thoughts as follows: true realism, the hardest thing, is not to find a philosophical theory, which satisfies certain requirements, or to occupy a particular kind of philosophical position, but to conduct one's philosophical enquiry in the right spirit. Empiricism is an attempt to be true to that spirit. Hence, a good way of illustrating what it might mean to do philosophy in a realistic spirit is to investigate how the empiricists did philosophy, to see where they were right and where they went wrong. As will become clear below, the problem with the empiricists is that they ultimately fail to be

⁶ Wittgenstein (1978: 325).

realistic despite their best intentions. The two central figures in the empiricist tradition around which Diamond's paper centres are Ramsey, against whom Wittgenstein's remark was directed, and Berkeley, who, being an *idealist*, is a particularly interesting example to discuss under the heading of the *realistic spirit*.⁷

How can empiricism, which gave rise to idealism and various other forms of explicitly anti-realist philosophies with its focus on experience, be seen as an attempt at realism? Diamond answers this question by reaching for three ways in which we talk about 'realism' outside philosophy⁸:

- 1) We tell people to 'be realistic' when they refuse to face the facts. One reason why people fail to be realistic in this way is because they are engaged in wishful thinking, or have a particular conception of how things *ought* to be.
- 2) We call stories unrealistic when they fail to pay attention to reality, for example by relying on cliché and constructing characters out of stereotypes, or by allowing things to happen through magic, myth, and fantasy – things which do not *really* happen. Literary criticism accuses novels of unrealism when they make heavy-handed use of convention, failing to pay proper attention to particulars.
- 3) We pay attention to causality. Someone who has high aspirations, but ignores statistics and has no understanding of how his aspirations might actually be realized in the world is unrealistic.

⁷ Despite his idealism, Berkeley can be classified as an empiricist insofar as he shares the basic empiricist commitment to the idea that knowledge is rooted in experience. How exactly Berkeleyan idealism relates to the attempt to be *realistic* in philosophy will become clear below.

⁸ Diamond (1991a: 39-41).

Diamond's idea is that empiricism might be thought to be realistic in the above three ways. Insofar as empiricism, as a mode of enquiry, is a sincere attempt to face the facts and pay attention to how things really work, it will be realistic, even if it gives rise to positions which are conventionally classified as anti-realist. This is because the above notion of realism is not concerned with defending a particular kind of position, but with the mode in which one conducts one's thinking. The realism at work in the above examples is better characterized as a spirit than as a position. Diamond's project is to show that this spirit is at work both in empiricism and in Wittgenstein, and that Wittgenstein supersedes the empiricists in showing that their philosophy remains unrealistic in certain respects, despite their best efforts.

Having given a non-philosophical account of what it means to be realistic, Diamond begins to illustrate how this account can be applied to empiricist philosophy by examining Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*. Hylas (Berkeley's spokesman for Lockean realism) makes an attempt to be realistic by trying to ground the distinction between real things and chimeras. He thinks that the difference must be located outside perception, because real things and chimeras are often perceptually indistinguishable. Hence, he postulates the existence of 'matter'. Philonous, his Berkeleyan interlocutor, responds that, contrary to appearances, the concept of matter cannot do any real work for Hylas. If it is independent of perception, then it is not clear how it could help us *distinguish* real things from chimeras; but if it does bear on perception, then it is unclear why the concept is needed in the first place, because the whole problem was supposed to be that one *cannot* distinguish perceptually between real things and chimeras. Either way,

the concept of matter seems to be an idle wheel, which merely *seems* to do explanatory work.⁹

Philonous' response to Hylas exemplifies the realistic spirit in the following ways: Hylas is unable to see how we in fact distinguish between real things and chimeras, because he has a particular conception of how the distinction *must* be grounded (namely *outside* perception), which leads Philonous to criticize him for refusing to look at the facts (see 1) above). Philonous also criticizes Hylas for then coming up with a story about the distinction which does not really work. Hylas is unable to show how exactly the concept of matter does what he needs it to do. One might say that in this sense, Hylas' account of matter is a kind of fantasy (see 2) and 3) above).

It is worth explaining the concept of fantasy in some detail, because it is central in much of Diamond's discussion. Diamond derives the concept of fantasy from discussions of realism in literature. A novel is unrealistic if it relies on fantasy to explain how things happen. What this means is spelled out in detail in a criticism George Orwell makes of Dickens. In some of Dickens' novels, a character's plight is ended by a rich man 'scattering guineas'.¹⁰ This is a fantasy of an explanation in that it fails to show *how* the problem-solving in question works. It is not clear how the appearance of the guinea-scattering man fits with the rest of the story. Like a magical 'fairy godmother', he just appears and makes the problems go away. Diamond contrasts fantastical explanations

⁹ Diamond (1991a: 43-48).

¹⁰ Diamond (1991a: 46).

with mistakes.¹¹ A mistaken explanation, though incorrect, would explain the matter at hand, if it were correct. A fantastical explanation, by contrast, merely looks like an explanation, but in fact offers no explanation at all. Dickens' guinea-scattering man does not constitute a wrong or mistaken idea about how problems are solved. He does not constitute an idea of how problems are solved at all. The character of the guinea-scattering man merely *appears* to solve problems. Diamond's idea is that Hylas' account of matter is fantastical in an analogous way. He fails to shoulder the burden of showing how things *actually* work, opting instead for something that merely looks like an explanation, but fails to do any real explanatory work. Diamond believes that the concept of fantasy, as a critical concept designed to overcome unrealism, is crucial for understanding how the realistic spirit might be fruitfully employed in philosophy.

The concept of fantasy enables Diamond to make a contrast between philosophical realism and the realistic spirit, as found in the title of her paper. She believes that philosophical realism is a fantasy which the realistic spirit must overcome, a point she makes by bringing yet another genre into the discussion: medieval hagiography, the biography of saints. Diamond argues that hagiography is a form of writing which is consciously unrealistic, despite the fact that hagiography is not a genre of fiction. Hagiography is the retelling of the lives of saints who are believed really to have existed. However, the primary aim of hagiography is not the accurate retelling of historical facts. Instead, hagiography aims at edification.¹² To this end, hagiography is governed by a

¹¹ Wittgenstein explicitly makes the mistake/fantasy contrast in §110 of *Philosophical Investigations*: "Language (or thought) is something unique"—this proves to be a superstition (*not* a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions.' Wittgenstein (1953: §110).

¹² Diamond (1991a: 52).

variety of *conventions* as to what can be said about saints. In particular, saints are by convention portrayed as possessing a variety of virtues. That the hagiographer is licensed, by the conventions of the genre, to ascribe to a saint a variety of saintly virtues can lead to incoherent narratives. As an example, Diamond discusses *The Little Flowers of St Francis* where the reader is told that St Francis did his utmost to conceal a stigma (a wound in his side, and a sign of divine favour). To do one's utmost to conceal stigmata is to conceal signs of divine favour – an example of saintly humility. The story loses its coherence when the other friars find out that St Francis has a stigma anyway, and in ways which are 'not very ingenious'.¹³ If St Francis was doing his *utmost* to conceal the wound, how could everyone else have found out about it without going to any serious trouble?

The incoherence in this narrative is a result of the conventions of the genre. Hagiography does not aim to tell the story of a saint's life as it *really* happened. Instead, it aims to edify. Nonetheless, we can ask what about the hagiography is true, and what is edificatory embellishment. Diamond writes: 'the existence of rules or conventions about what may appropriately be *said* or even *thought* about a certain matter, here saints' lives, leaves open the question what is *true* about those matters'.¹⁴ The question 'what is true about those matters' leads us into the territory of Diamond's realism described above. In the case of hagiography, this elementary (as opposed to philosophical) realism finds expression in the historian's sorting elements of the narrative which are corroborated by historical evidence from elements of the narrative merely derived from

¹³ Diamond (1991a: 51).

¹⁴ Diamond (1991a: 54).

the conventions of the literary genre. Elementary realism is interested not in conventions about what can be said, but in what is true.¹⁵

In contrast to the realistic spirit, the fantasy which Diamond calls philosophical realism originates in the attempt to do to our ordinary discourse about what is real something analogous to what elementary realism does to hagiographical discourse. The philosophical realist examines our ordinary discourse about reality and notes that we have, within that discourse, various ways of distinguishing between what is real and what is not. We have rules determining when we say of something that it is real and when we call it a mere appearance. Having realised this, the philosophical realist wants to make a move analogous to the historian's elementary realism in hagiography. He wants to say that, no matter what our methods of sorting reality from illusion may be in realist discourse, what is *actually* real, *actually* true 'is a different matter'.¹⁶ The thought here is that, while we may have established ways of distinguishing reality from illusion, it remains an open question whether those ways actually get at the truth. Having posed that question, the philosophical realist has to provide an account of what it *means* for something to be *true* – an account which is independent of our ordinary ways of distinguishing truth and falsehood, those ways having been called into question in the name of a quest for truth. Here we tend to find realists talking of objects *as they are in themselves*, independently of human perception – of things which are 'Absolutely Real'¹⁷, not just real according to our ordinary criteria. The problem with this way of

¹⁵ Recall that spinning narratives out of clichés and conventions was listed above as one of the ways in which literature can fail to be realistic.

¹⁶ Diamond (1991a: 56).

¹⁷ Diamond (1991a: 58).

talking, which attempts to drive a clear wedge between human perception and ideas about reality, is that the wedge deprives the philosophical realist of any possibility of making sense of his new parlance. If one's account of reality utterly transcends human experience, it is unclear how that account can be related back to experience, i.e., how it can be brought to bear on human life. The philosophical realist hence falls into fantasy of the Lockean kind. He falls into fantasy precisely by distorting an elementary realist impulse. Philosophical realism is a misfiring attempt to be realistic. Berkeleyan idealism shows up this attempt for the fantasy that it is, in so doing manifesting a realistic spirit.

However, Wittgenstein writes '*Not* empiricism and yet realism'. What is wrong with empiricism as an attempt at realism, if it successfully exposes philosophical fantasies as such? The answer is that in the attempt to overcome the fantasies of philosophical realism, empiricism tends to fall into fantasy of its own, which Diamond illustrates in a discussion of Ramsey, against whom Wittgenstein's opposition to empiricism was directed. Ramsey was concerned with providing an empiricist account of causation in response to Peirce, who had argued for the mind-independent reality of causal laws. Peirce posits that what he calls 'active general principles' in nature are independently real, because, if there were no such principles, we would be unable to distinguish between coincidences and reliable uniformities.¹⁸ The structure of the Peircean argument parallels that of the Lockean realist to whom Berkeley was responding: a distinction which we ordinarily make is taken to be in need of a philosophical underpinning. In the early modern debate, the distinction in question was the distinction

¹⁸ Diamond (1991a: 49).

between veridical and non-veridical perception, in Peirce's case it is the distinction between coincidence and causality. The Ramseyan criticism of Peirce takes the same form as the Berkeleyan criticism of Locke: the independent entity postulated to explain the distinction in question cannot be brought to bear on the issue, precisely because of its supposed independence. An active general principle which is wholly disconnected from our practices of establishing what is causal and what is coincidental cannot ground our distinction. By contrast, if the active general principle actually guides the way in which we make the distinction, if it is that by means of which we make the distinction, then it is not clear how 'active general principle' is anything more than a different way of referring to our ordinary ways of distinguishing between coincidence and causality. The idea of an active general principle derives its apparent philosophical force from the fact that it purports to be wholly independent of our ordinary practices, but it can only be brought to bear on those practices insofar as it is *not* so independent. It is a fantasy of an explanation in that it hovers between independence and dependence, leaving it wholly unclear how it *actually* bears on the distinction in question.

Having thus criticised Peircean realism, Ramsey goes on to provide his own, empiricist account of the distinction between coincidence and causality. According to Ramsey, an unknown causal law is 'the existence of certain singular facts which would lead us by a psychological law to accept a causal generalization'.¹⁹ Ramsey tries to explain causal laws by reference to psychological laws. A psychological law is here thought of as a mental process, a law of inference, which allows us to proceed from the facts of

¹⁹ Diamond (1991a: 60).

experience to the generalization. A set of singular facts is presented to the mind and the mind applies a psychological law, i.e., performs a mental operation, the result of which is a generalization. The existence of causal laws is hence explained dispositionally: for there to be a causal law is for there to be procedures in place (psychological laws) in virtue of which certain facts will lead to certain generalizations.²⁰ Ramsey takes this story to constitute an account of the meaning of unknown causal laws: for a causal law to obtain is for there to be such a story to tell about it.

But Ramsey's account is inadequate, which becomes clear when the concept of a psychological law is interrogated. Psychological laws, on Ramsey's conception, are themselves causal laws. If Ramsey were explaining unknown causal laws in terms of other unknown causal laws, his account would be bound to fail. This circularity is supposedly avoided by the nature of psychological laws. Being laws of the operations of the mind, we are supposed to have implicit knowledge of them. But this presents Ramsey with a dilemma. He either, implausibly, has to say that whatever we take to be a psychological law will count as such a law, effectively making us infallible judges of what constitutes a psychological law, or he has to admit the possibility that we might sometimes be mistaken about what counts as a psychological law. However, if he opts for the latter option, he has to provide an account of what distinguishes a real from a merely apparent psychological law and he cannot provide such an account without begging the question, given that his original account of unknown causal laws invoked

²⁰ One important caveat is that this causal generalization must of course not be misleading (see Diamond (1991a: 60)), which is roughly to say that it must not conflict with any other singular facts which might be encountered in our experience.

psychological laws. The Ramseyan conception of a psychological law itself begins to look like a fantasy of an explanation.

This is the point at which Diamond brings Wittgenstein into the discussion. Empiricism is driven by the attempt to be realistic, but in criticising the fantasies involved in philosophical realism, empiricists such as Berkeley and Ramsey fall for a fantasy of their own. Diamond shows how Wittgenstein's work can be seen as an attempt to characterize and uproot this empiricist fantasy. The fantasy in Berkeley and Ramsey is that they each implausibly accept something as *given* in order to meet a difficult explanatory demand. For Berkeley, what is given are sense-data, ideas. For Ramsey, what is given are psychological laws. Berkeley attempts to be more realistic than Locke by reducing the distinction between veridical and non-veridical perception to a distinction between different kinds of ideas. Ramsey attempts to be more realistic than Peirce by reducing the distinction between causality and coincidence to a distinction between different psychological operations. In both cases, it is assumed that we are directly aware of something in our psychology which can resolve the initial philosophical difficulty. The problem with the way in which Berkeley and Ramsey postulate awareness of our psychology as given is that, although the postulation is made in order to fulfil an explanatory demand, it is not obvious how the postulation meets the demand. It is not clear *how* psychological laws explain the difference between coincidence and causality, or how the concept of ideas explains the difference between veridical and non-veridical perception. The Wittgensteinian diagnosis of what goes wrong here is that Berkeley and Ramsey address themselves only to the positive accounts which philosophical realists provide, but in so doing they accept the *underlying* explanatory demands which drive

philosophical realism – demands which they attempt to meet with accounts of their own. Wittgenstein's idea is that the explanatory demands themselves are unrealistic, meaning that anyone who accepts them is bound to fall into fantasy.

The explanatory demand which leads Berkeley and Ramsey astray is the idea that it must be possible to give a general account of what distinguishes veridical from non-veridical perception, or coincidence from causality. What, according to Wittgenstein, is wrong with this demand? The shared assumption which lies at the heart of Berkeley and Ramsey's empiricism is the idea that what it means for a perception to be veridical, or what it means for something to be a coincidence, is somehow antecedently fixed. If these distinctions were antecedently fixed, it would make sense for philosophers to ask in the abstract what determines whether or not a perception is veridical, or whether or not a sequence of events is coincidental. Given that it is fixed what it means for something to be one thing or another, philosophers could legitimately ask *how* it is fixed. But it is Wittgenstein's point that the idea that it is determined, at some general level, what counts as veridical or non-veridical, before we go on to apply the concepts to particular cases, is a fantasy. Being realistic in philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, is to accept that the meaning of concepts is exemplified as we use them, not written into some real semantic space which the philosopher can simply describe. As Diamond puts it:

Realism in philosophy, the hardest thing, is open-eyedly giving up the quest for such an elucidation, the demand that a philosophical account of what I mean

make clear how it is fixed, out of all the possible continuations, out of some real semantic space, *which* I mean.²¹

The point of Wittgenstein's realistic spirit is to get us to see that there is no semantic space in which it is fixed what counts as a right application of a concept and what does not. What exactly this claim amounts to will be made clearer in the discussion of Kripke in Section 2a) below. The distinction between coincidence and causality is not somehow written in the stars. It is a distinction we make, and if we want to elucidate it, we must look to examples. What is a fantasy is that behind the examples we might give of coincidences and causalities, there must be a deeper unity, a real semantic space in which it is determined for all cases what is a coincidence and what a causal connection.

What I have suggested is that 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' has roughly the following structure: Diamond gives an account of realism which she draws from non-philosophical uses of the concept, particularly in literary criticism. She suggests that this conception of realism is at work in Berkeley when he criticizes Lockean realism. Literary criticism furnishes her with the concept of fantasy, which she brings to bear on the dispute between Berkeley and Locke. Medieval hagiography is brought in to explain how Lockean philosophical realism is a fantasy which results from distorting the elementary realism we find in ordinary language. Ramsey's critique of Peirce is then used to illustrate how empiricism fails to be truly realistic, despite its best intentions. Finally, Diamond shows how Wittgenstein exposes the empiricist fantasy that philosophers are tasked

²¹ Diamond (1991a: 69).

with navigating a space of antecedently given possibilities. While this account captures the general structure of the paper, it is important to note that Diamond frequently skips between these different discussions, introducing some initial parallels between Berkeley and Wittgenstein already at the beginning of the article, bringing Ramsey in at various different points, developing the concept of fantasy first in her general account of realism, and then again later in a discussion of the relation between Orwell's critique of Dickens and Berkeley's critique of Locke.

To attempt to reproduce the form of Diamond's paper in a summary would be chaos. The connections which Diamond makes are too ramified. However, the form is still important to emphasize because it is part of Diamond's attempt to exemplify the realistic spirit. If it is a fantasy to think that there is a fixed semantic space from which philosophy can take direction, to be realistic will be to accept that there is no one fixed way in which to proceed in philosophical investigation. What is realistic in philosophy, and what is not, will have to be shown on a case-by-case basis. The form of Diamond's writing is an attempt to make space for precisely this kind of case-by-case realism. Instead of subsuming each step of her argument under a master-narrative which enforces a particular continuation, she allows each of her examples to speak for itself, drawing various connections between them, and hence gradually allowing the realistic spirit, as she conceives of it, to unfold.

With a preliminary sketch of Diamond's paper in place, and the necessary caveats about having departed somewhat from the form of Diamond's discussion, in the following section, I want to examine three aspects of the realistic spirit in more detail, in order

further to flesh out the sketch I have already given and to pave the way for the discussion of the realistic spirit in ethics, which is the central concern of this thesis.

2. Characterizing the Realistic Spirit

For the purposes of my project, I want to draw attention to three features of the realistic spirit which emerge from the above discussion:

- a) The realistic spirit moves beyond the conventional philosophical opposition between realism and anti-realism.
- b) The realistic spirit has a perfectionist dimension, as a spirit of self-overcoming.
- c) The realistic spirit is not distinctively philosophical.

In this section, I will examine each of these claims in turn, thereby completing the above sketch of what I take the realistic spirit to be.

a) The Realistic Spirit Moves Beyond Realism and Anti-Realism.

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that Diamond presents 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' as a response to Kripke, but then never mentions Kripke again in the rest of the paper. In this section I want to explain the connection to Kripke and situate Diamond's work in the broader context of debates about realism and anti-realism in Wittgenstein. The realistic spirit shows both realism and anti-realism to involve fantasy.

The above account of the realistic spirit suggests that much of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is concerned to show different versions of philosophical realism to involve fantasy. For example, in the opening paragraphs of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is

concerned with repudiating a picture of language which construes meaning as a correspondence relation between language and a reality which is made up of objects for which words stand.²² Later in the book, in the rule-following remarks, Wittgenstein attacks what is sometimes called a Platonic conception of rules, which takes rules to have an independent reality such that they determine how we must go on, independently of what we actually do.²³ Connected to the rule-following remarks, the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* oppose Platonism in mathematics.²⁴ Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* is an attempt to make sense of Wittgenstein's criticism of philosophical realism in the context of rule-following.²⁵

One of Diamond's central concerns in 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' is to show that Wittgenstein's powerful attacks on philosophical realism are not to be read as embracing anti-realism, for example some form of verificationism. It is very tempting, as one sees Wittgenstein exposing philosophical realism as fantasy, to assume that he is putting forward anti-realist positions instead. This is what happens to Kripke, who, after arguing that Wittgenstein shows that it is a fantasy to appeal to independent Platonic rules to explain what determines whether or not a particular action accords with the rules or not, goes on to claim that Wittgenstein thought that whether or not a behaviour counts as rule-following is determined by the judgments of the speech community in which the action is situated.²⁶ This can sound like a realistic attempt to pay attention to how rule-following actually works, but, Diamond argues, it in fact embraces an anti-

²² PI §§1-43.

²³ PI §§138-242.

²⁴ RFM

²⁵ Kripke (1982).

²⁶ Kripke (1982: Part II).

realist account of rule-following, falling into a trap analogous to Berkeley and Ramsey's empiricism. Kripke embraces the underlying explanatory demands which gave rise to philosophical realism about rules (i.e., the demand that it be shown what distinguishes rule-following behaviour from behaviour which does not follow a rule), but shows that philosophical realism fails to meet the demand. Therefore, he finds himself *having* to embrace an anti-realist account, arguing that whether or not an action counts as rule-following depends on whether or not other speakers are willing to recognise it as rule-following. But this account is itself a fantasy. It takes the judgments of the community as given in the same way that Ramsey takes psychological laws as given. The explanatory burden is shifted onto a concept which cannot in fact do the requisite explanatory work.²⁷

Anti-realism differs from the realistic spirit in accepting the unrealistic explanatory demands which gave rise to the fantasy of philosophical realism. What is unrealistic, in Kripke's case, is to think that a general account *can* be given of what distinguishes following a rule from failing to do so. The realistic spirit, as conceived by Diamond, invites us to give up these explanatory demands because *both* realist and anti-realist responses to them lead into fantasy.²⁸ It is in this way that Wittgenstein is supposed to have achieved realism *without* empiricism. He opposes the fantasies of philosophical realism without falling for the corresponding fantasies of anti-realism. He escapes the

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of what is unrealistic in Kripke's account of rule-following, see Diamond (1989), as well as Anscombe (1985).

²⁸ Compare Wittgenstein's remark to Rhees: 'I don't try to make you believe something you don't believe, but to make you do something you won't do.' Rhees (1970: 43).

oscillation between the two positions by identifying their shared explanatory demands as unrealistic.

In this way the realistic spirit transcends conventional philosophical labelling. It does not matter that Berkeley is conventionally classified as an idealist. In his overcoming of Lockean philosophical realism, he develops a philosophy which is more *realistic* than Locke's, despite the fact that idealism is a form of anti-realism. However, as we have seen, Berkeleyan idealism contains fantasies of its own, which opens space for a further critique in a realistic spirit, which Diamond provides as part of her reading of Wittgenstein. If the realistic spirit transcends conventional philosophical labels, moving us past the dispute between realists and anti-realists, does this mean that we should think that Wittgenstein, in attacking the explanatory demands which gave rise to the dispute between realists and anti-realists, permanently saves philosophy from this quagmire? Is Diamond's idea that, if we read Wittgenstein correctly, we can find a general antidote to philosophical fantasy in his realistic spirit? Section b) suggests that the answer to this question is complicated.

b) The Realistic Spirit is a Spirit of Self-Overcoming.

In this section, I want to show that the realistic spirit is not just a spirit of criticism, but also a spirit of self-criticism, or self-overcoming. It has been shown that a central aspect of the realistic spirit is its attempt to avoid fantasy. The fact that realistic criticisms of philosophical realism often embrace a form of anti-realism (Kripke, Berkeley and Ramsey) suggests that the attempt to be realistic by avoiding fantasy *can* breed fantasy

of its own. Is there a way of avoiding this, or does doing philosophy in a realistic spirit require embracing the possibility that one can become entangled in a new fantasy even as one overcomes a previous one? I want to suggest that there is no fail-safe way of guarding against fantasy, and that the realistic spirit should hence be construed as a spirit of self-overcoming, i.e., a spirit which occupies an inherently self-critical stance. I want to illustrate how this is so by discussing Peter Winch's attempt to provide a Wittgensteinian account of truth in response to Dummettian realism. Winch attempts to provide a realistic critique of Dummett by showing Dummettian realism to constitute a fantasy. However, in so doing he unintentionally embraces a form of anti-realism, despite his best attempt to be true to Wittgenstein's realistic spirit.

The topic of truth gives rise to a similar dialectic between realist and anti-realist positions as the rule-following debate. Michael Dummett's philosophical realist holds that for a proposition to be true is for there to be a metaphysics of facts corresponding to it. A proposition is true, if it is true, in virtue of a fact which makes it true. Wittgenstein takes the notion of a metaphysics of facts to constitute a philosophical fantasy. It is not clear how to say that 'p' is true in virtue of some fact is to say anything more than that 'p' is true. It is tempting to read Wittgenstein's rejection of Dummettian realism as embracing the anti-realist, or deflationary view, which would be to say that all that there is to the concept of truth is the correspondence platitude that 'p' is true if and only if p. Deflationism holds that all we need, in order to explain the concept of truth, is the thought that "'p' is true' is equivalent to 'p'. Winch, however, wants to go in a different direction. He believes that explaining the truth-predicate away by appealing to the correspondence platitude is just as unrealistic as embracing a metaphysics of facts. Both

approaches fail properly to examine how the concept of truth actually works. So far, Winch's account seems to exemplify the realistic spirit in that it constitutes an attempt to move beyond two opposing philosophical theories that fail properly to account for the discourse they purport to explain.

Winch develops his ostensibly Wittgensteinian account of truth in 'Am Anfang war die Tat'.²⁹ The Dummettian realist bases his account of truth on the idea that 'a thought can be true only if there is something in virtue of which it is true'.³⁰ This leads the Dummettian realist to embrace a metaphysics of facts – a mysterious realm of truth-makers. The tempting Wittgensteinian move would be to reject the Dummettian claim in order to avoid the ensuing metaphysical fantasy. This would leave us with deflationism: there is nothing *in virtue of which* propositions are true – for a proposition to be true is just for it to be assertible. Winch tries to avoid both realism and deflationism by accepting the Dummettian claim that 'a thought can be true only if there is something in virtue of which is true', but denying that the 'something' in question has to be metaphysical:

[T]he 'realist's' thesis that a thought can be true only if there is something in virtue of which it is true can be given a perfectly acceptable interpretation. [...] [O]n this interpretation, what this 'something' is has to be understood in the context of what we are willing to count as a case of exhibiting it, and [...] this will vary enormously for different kinds of case.³¹

²⁹ Winch (1987).

³⁰ Winch (1987: 39).

³¹ Winch (1987: 41).

Winch thinks he can accept the Dummettian demand for a truth-maker and yet give an account which does not appeal to a metaphysics of facts. His thought is that a realist metaphysics can be avoided by acknowledging that what counts as exhibiting the truth of a proposition will be very different in different kinds of language-game. He wants to keep the Dummettian requirement that true propositions must be true in virtue of something, because it registers the fact that 'we cannot simply assert anything at will'.³² But Dummett's realist goes wrong in demanding that the something which determines whether or not a proposition is true must always have the same form. It is this further thought which leads to the postulation of a metaphysics of facts. Winch's thought is that, if this further requirement is dropped, truth can be explained for any given proposition by explicating the structure of the language-game in which the proposition is situated. For example, what it means for a past-tense statement to be true can be explained by describing how we base what counts as a legitimate claim about the past on present-tense criteria in our linguistic practice of talking about the past.³³

Winch attempts to be realistic by showing how the concept of truth is employed in our actual linguistic practices, instead of falling for the philosophical fantasy of trying to provide an abstract general account of truth, realist or anti-realist. Nonetheless, Diamond argues that there is something unrealistic about Winch's account. Winch claims to have avoided anti-realism, claims that he is not reducing truth to warranted

³² Winch (1987: 40).

³³ Winch (1987: 44-45).

assertibility as the deflationists do. However, Diamond believes that Winch's account is anti-realist in spite of Winch's intentions.³⁴

Winch wants to explicate what it means for a proposition to be true by looking to the role the proposition plays in the language-game in which it is at home. Diamond's worry is that this relativizes truth to the language-game, which leaves the Winchian account unable to make sense of phenomena such as Diamond's discussion of hagiography. In Winch's account, whether or not a given proposition is true is determined by the rules of the language-game. The rules of the hagiography-game determine that St Francis can be said to have concealed his stigmata, which means that, in Winch's account, the statement that St Francis concealed his stigmata will be true. But the statement is false. We can ask whether the claims made in hagiography are *really* true by running them against elementary realism, thereby seeing how they hold up once we move *beyond* the hagiography-game. Winch overlooks the fact that language-games are not insulated.

The Dummettian realist wants a general account of what makes propositions true. Winch, writing in a realistic spirit, argues that the demand for such a general account is bound to lead to fantasy, suggesting instead that we must examine what renders a proposition true on a case-by-case basis: whether or not a given proposition is true will depend on the language-game in which it is situated, and hence one must, for any given proposition, look to the relevant language-game, if one is to understand what it means

³⁴ Diamond makes this point in 'Unfolding Truth and Reading Wittgenstein', which provides an extensive criticism of Winch, as well as providing an alternative sketch as to how the concept of truth might be approached in a realistic spirit. Diamond (2003). For a discussion of the broader challenges that Diamond's discussion poses for the realistic spirit, see Burleigh (2024a).

for it to be true. But according to Diamond, there is unrealism even in this view, because it is a fantasy to think that one can determine what it means for a proposition to be true by locating it in a particular language-game. Truth often depends on the connections we make *between* language-games, as the hagiography example illustrates. It is by bringing elementary realism to bear on the hagiography-game that it is shown which hagiographical propositions are true and which are false.

The Winchian mistake can help to bring the realistic spirit into clearer focus. In the previous section, I suggested that Berkeley and Ramsey make the mistake of assuming something as given in order to make sense of and meet a philosophical requirement. For Berkeley it was the thought that the question what separates veridical from non-veridical perception can be framed against the background of a theory of ideas, for Ramsey it was the thought that the differences between laws of nature and mere regularities can be spelled out via an appeal to psychological laws. In a similar way, Winch accepts the Wittgensteinian vocabulary of language-games as the given background in terms of which to spell out truth. Hence, when he is confronted with the Dummettian explanatory demand that every true proposition must be true *in virtue of something*, Winch feels confident he can accept the demand, because he has a vocabulary available in terms of which he can answer it without needing to appeal to a metaphysics of facts. He can simply explore how the proposition in question is situated in the language-game. Diamond then argues that the blind acceptance of the Wittgensteinian thought that the illegitimate metaphysics in Dummettian realism can be overcome by investigating the structure of language-games leads Winch to overlook the connections we make *between* language-games.

The structure of the dispute between Dummett's realist, Winch and Diamond illustrates how the realistic spirit is a spirit of criticism. Winch is realistic by criticising Dummettian realism, Diamond is realistic by in turn criticising Winch's critique. Two interconnected questions arise from this iterative structure: 1. Why is it that the attempts to be realistic that have been discussed so far (Berkeley, Ramsey, Winch) each fall into a new kind of fantasy as part of the attempt to overcome a previous fantasy? 2. Is Diamond's realistic spirit supposed to escape this cycle by doing philosophy in a way which avoids fantasy altogether, or is Diamond's work just another *attempt* to be true to the realistic spirit, which must remain open to the possibility that it will eventually itself be shown to involve fantasy? I will address each question in turn.

1: The realistic spirit is realistic by avoiding fantasies. Philosophical fantasies arise when philosophers accept illegitimate explanatory demands and hence find themselves having to answer questions which are not in fact answerable. The critical attempt to expose fantasies, as exemplified in the various philosophical exchanges discussed so far, involves i) dislodging illegitimate explanatory demands, and ii) sketching a different possible way of construing the matter at hand. These two processes are closely related. Dislodging an illegitimate explanatory demand requires showing why the demand is illegitimate, which often means describing the relevant landscape in a way which makes it possible to see why the demand does not in fact arise. This means that the dissolution of a given fantasy often requires putting forward various positive claims – claims which can involve fantasies of their own. Berkeley, Ramsey and Winch seem to be insufficiently aware of this feature of the realistic spirit. As one provides a critique of another

philosophy, in an attempt to be realistic, it is tempting to want to say something which could itself not possibly be accused of unrealism. Berkeley, Ramsey and Winch each reach for frameworks which are supposed to guarantee that they are being realistic. For Berkeley it is the information we are simply given in perception, for Ramsey it is the self-awareness we are supposed to have of our psychology, and for Winch it is the Wittgensteinian philosophical vocabulary and method. Diamond's point in presenting this as a history of failure seems to be that the attempt to give one's philosophy a stable framework is inherently unrealistic. *Every* attempt to be realistic *might* be shown to depend on fantasy. There are no guarantees of realism. The shared fantasy that Berkeley, Ramsey and Winch all seem to fall for is the fantasy that it *is* possible to guarantee realism.

The idea that it is possible to guarantee realism is associated with a particular picture of philosophy which Wittgenstein powerfully presents in the *Investigations* – a picture which can easily lead to quietist interpretations of Wittgenstein. It is tempting to see Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* as making a clear distinction between philosophy and ordinary language. Remarks such as ‘philosophy leaves everything as it is’ or ‘What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards [*Luftgebäude*] and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.’³⁵ can be particularly misleading. The image of a ground of language upon which the philosopher builds *Luftgebäude* is extremely powerful, but gives rise to a picture of philosophy as completely disconnected from ordinary life. There is ordinary language: solid, undisturbed, perfectly in order, to be left

³⁵ Wittgenstein (1953: §118).

as it is, and then there is philosophical language, which has taken off from this ground, gone on a holiday³⁶ in the air, where it appears to be doing something, but actually does nothing. It is the philosopher's task to destroy the *Luftgebäude* of philosophy, and hence return to the rough ground³⁷ of ordinary language. The picture, then, is one of ordinary language forming an undisturbed plane, with philosophy hovering above it, waiting to be destroyed. It is tempting to see the realistic spirit as the destroyer of houses of cards, as dissolving fantasies by means of a method which is guaranteed to be free from fantasy, qua rooted in undistorted, ordinary language.

2: I want to suggest that it is Diamond's point that the above construal of the realistic spirit is itself unrealistic, because the thought that realism can be guaranteed is a fantasy. The key to this reading of Diamond is to understand how the realistic spirit depends both on the dissolution of illegitimate explanatory demands together with their concomitant fantasies *and* on the articulation of alternative modes of thinking which the fantasies obscure.³⁸ Given that the dissolution of fantasies depends on articulating alternatives, philosophy cannot avoid giving positive characterizations of forms of life. But, as Winch's failure to be realistic shows, there is no way of guaranteeing that attempts to characterize forms of life without fantasy will be successful. Winch sets out merely to describe how we use the word 'true', but in his description shows himself to be in the grip of the fantasy that language-games are isolable. The point is that Winch's

³⁶ Wittgenstein (1953: §38).

³⁷ Wittgenstein (1953: §107).

³⁸ This dual structure can be seen as a reformulation of the more conventional Wittgensteinian thought that philosophical problems tend to arise when we mistake nonsense for sense. Wittgenstein exposes philosophical nonsense as such by demonstrating that, contrary to appearances, the words in question have not been assigned a sense. This often involves giving an overview of the adjacent landscape in which the words that are put to a confused use in philosophy are originally at home.

slipping into philosophical theorizing happens just as he takes himself to be bringing down a confused philosophical theory *by bringing words back to their everyday uses*. What Winch's example suggests is that, because the attempt to dissolve fantasy will, at least in part, involve articulating alternatives to the fantasy in question, there is no way of telling in advance whether the alternatives which one articulates are themselves free of fantasy. There is no way of ensuring that one's uses of language are ordinary as opposed to philosophical. Whether a use is one, or another, will have to be shown.

If this is right, then the realistic spirit is not just a spirit of criticism, but a spirit of self-criticism. There is no way of being certain that one has succeeded in being realistic in one's thinking, no matter how many fantasies one dissolves. Each attempt to dissolve fantasy, each attempt to articulate an alternative to a philosophical *must*, can fall prey to a *new* fantasy. Hence, Diamond's work is no safer from unrealism than anybody else's. It is merely more self-aware. The realistic spirit, as formulated by Diamond, is a perfectionist spirit of self-overcoming. It seeks to expose fantasies, while being fully aware that the attempt to expose fantasy can breed new fantasy which will in turn need to be overcome.

c) The Realistic Spirit is not Distinctively Philosophical.

So far, the discussion has focused almost exclusively on the role that the realistic spirit plays in philosophy. However, the realistic spirit is not distinctively philosophical. The concept of realism on which Diamond's discussion of the realistic spirit is based is derived from outside philosophy, and has application in various contexts, as Diamond's

discussion of literary criticism and history indicates. In this section, I want to give a brief overview of the role the realistic spirit might be thought to play outside philosophy, in order further to clarify what kind of a spirit Diamond is talking about, and also to pave the way for its application to ethics.

Diamond derives various aspects of the realistic spirit from literary criticism. In the above discussion, I summarized her view as follows:

We call stories unrealistic when they fail to pay attention to reality, for example by relying on cliché and constructing characters out of stereotypes, or by allowing things to happen through magic, myth, and fantasy – things which do not *really* happen.

In his account of the realistic spirit, Stephen Mulhall places the connection with literary criticism centre stage, arguing that the realistic novel's uneasy relation to convention can be analogous to the self-critical structure which the realistic spirit has in philosophy.³⁹

The realistic novel as a literary form originated as a reaction to the conventions of the genre of romance. The conventions of that genre, though attempts to capture an important dimension of reality, were seen, by the early realist novelists, as having become impediments to an accurate portrayal of reality.⁴⁰ However, Mulhall points out that the realistic novel immediately became yet another literary genre, with a new set

³⁹ Mulhall (2012).

⁴⁰ Mulhall (2012: 8).

of conventions – necessarily so: a novel, no matter how much it strives to be realistic, can only ever give an *impression* of realism. In reality it remains, after all, fictional. The impression of realism is conveyed via literary conventions. The author's task is to employ conventions while making it seem as though her narrative is free from convention. A particularly powerful example is Sterne's fictional autobiography *Tristram Shandy*, which attempts 'to live up to the requirement that there be a one-to-one temporal correspondence between the novel and the reader's experience of it'⁴¹. Tristram's attempt to live up to this convention is a complete failure, leading to an absurd narrative. The ingenuity of the novel is that in demonstrating the limitations of the conventional attempt to be realistic through one-to-one temporal correspondence, Sterne manages to make the reader believe in the reality of Tristram, who is supposedly writing the narrative in question. Seeing Tristram plausibly fail to produce a realistic piece of writing makes him a believable character. The problem is that the move that makes Sterne's narrative believable is itself in danger of becoming a new convention. The struggle of the realist novel, the modernist challenge, is that relying too heavily on convention exposes the story as fictional, but doing away with convention altogether means doing away with the genre. Hence, the modernist project in literature is the attempt to retain realism by constantly finding new ways to overcome previous conventions.⁴²

The parallel between literary criticism and Diamond's conception of a realistic spirit in philosophy, according to Mulhall, is that Diamond inherits this same modernist

⁴¹ Mulhall (2012: 8).

⁴² Mulhall (2012: 9).

predicament in a philosophical context. Diamond sets out to attack philosophical requirements – preconceptions about what a philosophical account *must* be like. Diamond's realism manifests in her constant refusal to allow a particular philosophical vocabulary (even a 'Wittgensteinian' one) to dictate her thinking. Berkeley, Ramsey and Winch each employ particular vocabularies, particular frameworks, in order to expose fantasy in the works of their interlocutors. Diamond's point is that, despite the fact that these frameworks are designed with the explicit purpose of exposing fantasy, they can involve fantasies of their own, calling for another iteration of realist critique. Mulhall reads the realistic spirit as a willingness to put into question even those concepts which in most contexts help the descriptive endeavour to put reality clearly into view.⁴³ To be willing, when pressed, to give up the representational devices of realism is here taken to be an exemplary instance of being realistic.

Diamond's discussion of hagiography can be used to show that a similar structure finds itself in history. When the historian employs elementary realism to ask which elements of a hagiographical narrative are really true, and which are merely due to the conventions of the genre, she is writing in a realistic spirit. An interesting question which arises here is to what extent elementary realism might itself turn out to be a convention which is in need of overcoming. Does the fact that a narrative does not 'pay attention to the facts' and does not show how things cohere causally always constitute a reason to dismiss it as fantasy? This is a particularly interesting question to ask in the context of hagiography, which, among other things, deals with miracles. While it seems perfectly

⁴³ Mulhall (2012: 10).

legitimate to appeal to elementary realism in order to weed out aspects of the stories, which were included merely on the basis of convention, would it be equally legitimate to appeal to elementary realism to determine that St Francis did not have stigmata to begin with? Or is elementary realism in danger of obscuring phenomena which do not fit with our current conception of realism?

No matter how helpful a set of considerations such as elementary realism may be in one's attempt to be realistic, it is possible for the very considerations which enable one to be realistic in one context to constitute a fantasy in another. This structure is not peculiar to philosophy. It is equally present in literature and history, and there seems to be no reason to think that it does not have an even broader application. Any discourse in which there is space for realism will face the challenge that whatever vocabulary one crafts in order to expose fantasy will be in danger of becoming a source of fantasy itself. In the following section, I will begin to examine what this suggests about the role the realistic spirit might be thought to play in ethics. First, however, I want to summarize the results of the discussion up until this point.

I have suggested that the realistic spirit has three central features, which will be important as we move into an ethical context. 1) The realistic spirit moves beyond both realism and anti-realism, suggesting that both of these positions are responses to unrealistic explanatory demands. 2) The realistic spirit is a fantasy-avoiding spirit. Fantasies are avoided by dismantling illegitimate explanatory demands and articulating alternative modes of thinking. However, there is never a guarantee that one's attempt to overcome fantasies does not introduce new fantasies. Hence, the realistic spirit is a

spirit of self-criticism. 3) The realistic spirit is disciplinarily neutral. It has application not only in philosophy, but also in literature, history, and all other forms of writing in which it is possible to be unrealistic.

3. Applying the Realistic Spirit to Ethics

The third claim in the above section indicates that the realistic spirit can be applied across different disciplines. It is plausible to think that the realistic spirit has an ethical dimension throughout these diverse applications: It is good for us to be in contact with reality; to live in a world of fantasy would be a misfortune. The question how the realistic spirit relates to ethics is hence extremely broad and extremely complex: it is the question what is good about being realistic, and this question may have different answers in different domains. I want to confine my study to the sub-question what it might mean to bring the realistic spirit to bear specifically on ethics, conceived as a philosophical discipline.

Like all other domains of thought which strive to be realistic, ethics, or moral philosophy, can involve philosophical fantasies which the realistic spirit might help to expose. Hence, the realistic spirit can find application in ethics as a fantasy-avoiding spirit in the same way in which it finds application in other branches of philosophy, literature and history. A good example is MacIntyre's criticism of Bloomsbury intuitionism. Intuitionism in ethics and aesthetics is the view that we possess a faculty of moral/aesthetic intuition which apprehends non-natural properties such as goodness or beauty. G.E. Moore's intuitionism develops as the result of a strong commitment to objective moral and

aesthetic standards, coupled with a refusal to make sense of those standards in naturalistic terms.⁴⁴ MacIntyre diagnoses the intuitionism of the Bloomsbury group, developed by Moore in *Principia Ethica*, as a kind of covert emotivism.⁴⁵ The idea is that intuitionists are, in effect, emotivists, but emotivists who have deluded themselves into thinking that they are basing their moral judgments on a non-natural moral reality to which they have access through a distinctive faculty of moral intuition. Intuitionism constitutes a fantasy in that what actually determines how the intuitionists proceed in ethics is their sense of rightness, *not* an independent moral reality. Indeed, it is unclear how 'moral reality' as they conceive of it *could* guide action. In this way, their variety of moral realism seems to be precisely analogous to Peirce's realism about active general principles. They determine what constitutes moral reality on the basis of what they think is right, but then they speak as if the moral reality had somehow *made itself known* to them. This is precisely the sort of hovering between dependence and independence which Ramsey criticised in Peirce. If MacIntyre's account of intuitionism is correct, intuitionism is philosophical fantasy par excellence. In Chapter 3, I will suggest that Sophie Grace Chappell's recently proposed 'recognitionist realism' falls prey to a similar fantasy.

First, in Chapter 2, I will investigate the way in which Cora Diamond herself has suggested the realistic spirit might be applied to ethics. In an exchange with Sabina Lovibond, Diamond exposes various aspects of Lovibond's attempts at moral realism as fantastical, pointing to a different, more realistic way of approaching the subject of

⁴⁴ Moore believes that naturalism in ethics fails on the grounds of his 'open-question argument'. Moore (1903: Chapter 3).

⁴⁵ See MacIntyre (1981: Chapters 2–4).

ethics as an alternative. Chapter 2 sketches Diamond's criticisms of Lovibond and her proposed alternative approach to ethics and raises some potential difficulties for the Diamondian project, which are addressed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Before I turn to this investigation, I want to mention a general concern one might have about Diamond's attempt to do philosophy in a realistic spirit – a concern which will turn out to be particularly pertinent as the discussion moves into ethical territory. The realistic spirit, conceived as a spirit of self-criticism, can breed a particular kind of anxiety: the fact that fantasy might be lurking in *any* position which one articulates can make it tempting to try, insofar as possible, to avoid articulating positions altogether. One might try to achieve this by limiting oneself in philosophy to criticizing the unrealism of others. This defensive strategy comes with various problems, the most important one being that it is itself based on fantasy. As was argued in section 2, the attempt to expose fantasy *requires* saying something positive. One must explain how the fantasy is a fantasy, and one must articulate those phenomena which one takes the fantasy to be obscuring. This means that the *purely* critical stance is a fiction. One cannot avoid making claims of one's own, even if one tries by limiting one's work to criticism. Hence, it is important to bear in mind the following Wittgensteinian piece of advice, which Philippa Foot quotes in *Natural Goodness*:

Wittgenstein interrupted a speaker who had realized that he was about to say something that, although it seemed compelling, was clearly ridiculous, and was trying (as we all do in such circumstances) to say something sensible instead.

'No,' said Wittgenstein. 'Say what you *want* to say. Be *crude* and then we shall get on.'⁴⁶

Sometimes, Diamond's way of doing philosophy in a realistic spirit can leave one worried that this piece of advice from Wittgenstein is going unheeded. Focusing on exposing the mistakes of others can be a way of trying to avoid making conversational contributions oneself. It can be a way of trying to avoid dealing with the fantasies that beset one's *own* thinking. To what extent this is a problem in Diamond's work is one of the central questions I intend to investigate as I examine Diamond's realistic spirit in ethics.

⁴⁶ Foot (2001: 1).

Chapter 2: Realism in Ethics

The previous chapter explained the Diamondian concept of a realistic spirit. Diamond developed this concept as a response to anti-realist readings of Wittgenstein. Some years later, Diamond set out to distinguish the realistic spirit from philosophical realism in a paper ('Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Ethics' (WME)⁴⁷) discussing the ostensibly Wittgensteinian moral realism, which Sabina Lovibond develops in *Realism, Imagination and Ethics* (RIE)⁴⁸. In this second chapter, I want to explore Diamond's engagement with Lovibond as a case study which shows the realistic spirit in action. At the same time, I want to move the discussion from general meta-philosophical issues into explicitly ethical territory, opening the door to various issues in moral philosophy, which the realistic spirit raises.

The central question at issue in the exchange between Diamond and Lovibond is whether ethics ought to be thought of as having a subject matter. Lovibond suggests that ethics is the study of moral reality, just as physics is the study of physical reality. Diamond objects that there is something unrealistic about this way of thinking about ethics. According to Diamond, ethics ought not to be thought of as a descriptive endeavour. She takes the idea that ethics has a subject matter, i.e., something that it is about, to be a philosophical fantasy, which ought to be overcome in a realistic spirit. The interesting question that then arises is how, according to Diamond, we should think

⁴⁷ Diamond (1996).

⁴⁸ Lovibond (1983).

about ethics instead. Diamond's engagement with this question will constitute the point of departure for the discussion in ensuing chapters.

I begin the chapter with a summary of Lovibond's approach to moral philosophy in RIE (Section 1), briefly outline which aspects of RIE are relevant for Diamond and why she is critical of Lovibond's approach (Sections 2 and 3), discuss Lovibond's response to Diamond's criticism, along with commentary by Stephen Mulhall (Section 4), explain Edward Harcourt's recent critical reading of Diamond (Section 5), and offer an account of how Diamond might acknowledge some of her critics' worries without compromising on the realistic spirit (Section 6).

1. Lovibond's Account of Moral Philosophy⁴⁹

Sabina Lovibond's *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* is an attempt to reconcile cognitivism and non-cognitivism in ethics via Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.⁵⁰ Cognitivists hold that moral language is descriptive of a moral reality, non-cognitivists argue that moral language is not descriptive, but expressive. Lovibond aims to reconcile the two views by suggesting that moral language describes a moral reality (as cognitivists believe), but that there is nothing metaphysical involved in such description (accommodating the non-cognitivist critique). Cognitivism and non-cognitivism, according to Lovibond, share a misconception concerning what it means for a proposition to describe something. On the standard story, for a proposition to be

⁴⁹ The following three sections have been published in Burleigh (2024b: 104-112), with minor alterations.

⁵⁰ Lovibond (1983).

descriptive is for there to be a relation between the proposition and a metaphysical fact in virtue of which the proposition is true or false. The cognitivist holds that there are ethical facts of the relevant kind, the non-cognitivist denies that there are such facts. According to Lovibond, the cognitivist's metaphysical assertion and the non-cognitivist's claim that moral discourse is not about anything are equally confused.

Lovibond thinks that language is metaphysically homogeneous. By this she means that 'talking about something' can be equated with having indicative form.⁵¹ When a sentence has indicative form, i.e., relates a subject to a predicate, we can generally say, merely on the basis of this structural feature, that the sentence is about the subject and about the predicate. 'John is generous.' is about John, and about being generous. We do not need any knowledge about John, or generosity, to understand that this sentence is about those things. The aboutness-claim can be made simply on the basis of the proposition's syntactic structure. Lovibond thinks that the concept of reality is merely a tool for registering this structural fact about language: 'the only legitimate role for the idea of 'reality' is that in which it is coordinated with [...] the metaphysically neutral idea of 'talking about something''.⁵² Lovibond finds this idea in Wittgenstein and it provides the foundation for her reconciliation of cognitivism and non-cognitivism. By freeing description of any metaphysical commitments, she can accommodate the non-cognitivist critique of metaphysics in ethics while holding onto the cognitivist commitment that ethics is descriptive and fact-stating.

⁵¹ Lovibond (1983: 26).

⁵² Lovibond (1983: 25).

Lovibond's claim that description just consist in 'talking about something', meaning the move from predication to aboutness-claims, has as a corollary that what a proposition is about is determined by the predicates it employs. Hence, employment of moral concepts is what makes it the case that a proposition is about ethics. Lovibond's metaphysical homogeneity idea then amounts to the claim that *ethics is indicative discourse involving moral concepts*.

2. Diamond's Objections to Lovibond Summarized

There are two respects in which what Lovibond does might be thought to exemplify a realistic spirit. 1) Lovibond takes the dispute between cognitivists and non-cognitivists to be based on a philosophical confusion: they share the assumption that, if there are to be any true moral claims, there must be a metaphysics of facts in virtue of which these claims are true. Lovibond exposes this assumption as a misguided metaphysical requirement. 2) Lovibond is opposed to the psychologization of ethics which goes hand in hand with non-cognitivism. She wants to avoid metaphysical realism, but without reducing ethics to mere psychology. This is reminiscent of Diamond's opposition to Ramsey's empiricism. There is a strong temptation to try to replace the metaphysical realism of a Peirce, or a Moore, with a simple account of human psychology: where Peirce thought there were laws of nature, Ramsey says there are only psychological laws. Where Moore thought that there were non-natural moral facts, accessible through a special faculty of intuition, his non-cognitivist critics argue that there are just attitudes. Diamond and Lovibond both attempt to overcome metaphysical realism without adopting a psychologistic account. They both try to achieve 'realism *without empiricism*'.

It is precisely because Lovibond *seems* to be writing in a realistic spirit that Diamond engages with her work. Diamond believes that Lovibond, much like Winch, is in the grip of a philosophical fantasy in spite of her best efforts to be realistic.

Diamond sums up her objections against Lovibond with the claim that ethics lacks a subject-matter. Diamond makes this point in two steps, both confronting Lovibond's account with counterexamples: the first thing Diamond does is to offer Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics as a counterexample to Lovibond's claim that being descriptive and having indicative form are the same thing. In the second step of her argument, Diamond shows that ethics can be fruitfully compared to mathematics, offering five examples of ethical discourse which show in what sense ethics might be thought to lack a subject-matter. Together, these two steps refute Lovibond's account of ethics.

In the *Lectures on Mathematics*, Wittgenstein makes a contrast between mathematics and physics, claiming that, unlike propositions of physics, mathematical propositions should not be thought of as corresponding to any state of affairs in the world.⁵³ '20+10=30' should not be thought to be about anything. Instead, its function comes out in the fact that it allows us to infer, for example, from the fact that twenty guests from the bride's family and ten guests from the groom's family are attending the wedding, that thirty guests are attending in total. Mathematical propositions allow us to move from one thought to another in the mathematical calculus. The Wittgensteinian point is

⁵³ Wittgenstein [1989: 239].

that they can have this function without making any claims about reality. Of course, we can apply Lovibond's structural claim about language to '20+10=30' and say that the equation is, among other things, about the number twenty. There is nothing wrong with saying this, but it can be misleading, because it makes it tempting to think that the equation describes something. It is Wittgenstein's point that to say that '20+10=30' is about the number 20 is very different from saying, for example, that 'Uranium is a radioactive element' is about Uranium.⁵⁴ Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics shows that descriptive and indicative form are, contra Lovibond, not always the same. A proposition can be indicative without being descriptive. Lovibond may not be wrong about her structural claim that we can move from 'A is B' to the claim that the sentence is about A and about B, but she is wrong to construe this structural fact as the definitive meaning of 'talking about something'. According to Diamond, it is misleading to think of mathematics as talking about anything, precisely because, ordinarily, when we think of a discourse as 'talking about something' we mean more than that it involves predication. This undermines the foundation of Lovibond's argument in RIE. Language is not, in Lovibond's sense, metaphysically homogeneous.⁵⁵

Refuting the argument upon which Lovibond's account of ethics is based does not on its own demonstrate that her account is wrong. In order fully to refute Lovibond's account,

⁵⁴ In this respect, mathematics is much like logic. Modus ponens can be stated as part of one's reasoning, but says nothing about the world. ' $P \rightarrow Q, P \vdash Q$ ' is a rule of inference, not a description. It could, of course, be used to describe the way in which we make inferences, but if it were used in this way, it would be robbed of its logical status. Used descriptively, it would be a proposition of empirical psychology.

⁵⁵ Of course, this does not mean that 'Uranium is a radioactive element.' has a metaphysical fact corresponding to it. The point which Diamond is making is that there is something setting this proposition apart from mathematical propositions. That something need not be metaphysics. Diamond is opposed to Lovibond's homogeneity idea, not to her hostility to metaphysics.

Diamond needs to show that Lovibond's positive claim about ethics, that it is reducible to indicative discourse involving moral concepts, is false. Three of Diamond's examples of moral discourse are primarily intended to make this point. Her first example is Ingalls Wilder's *The Long Winter*, a children's book which aims to morally edify by describing characters doing something 'very fine', namely saving a village from starvation at great personal risk.⁵⁶ It does so without recourse to distinctively moral concepts. Second, Diamond cites the novels of Primo Levi and John Prebble, both of whom are authors who have been celebrated for the moral depth of their writings – a depth which, Diamond argues, has nothing to do with moral concepts appearing in their work.⁵⁷ Later in the paper, she quotes Anscombe reporting Wittgenstein as saying that the ethical force of Tolstoy's moral thought comes out best in novels such as *Hadji Murad*, by contrast with his explicitly ethical writings, suggesting once again that it is not necessarily moral concepts that make a text ethical.⁵⁸ If Diamond is right that these examples are instances of moral discourse (as they seem to be), Lovibond's account of ethics as indicative discourse involving moral concepts is refuted.

3. Mathematics and Ethics: The Deeper Interest of Lovibond's Moral Philosophy

Diamond's account of mathematics refutes Lovibond's metaphysically homogeneous account of language, and her three examples of moral discourse refute Lovibond's ensuing claim that ethics is indicative discourse involving moral concepts. Wherein, then, lies the continued interest of engagement with Lovibond's RIE? Diamond is not

⁵⁶ Diamond (1996: 227). For a full account of these very fine acts, see Ingalls Wilder (1962).

⁵⁷ Diamond specifically cites Levi (1979) and Prebble (1969).

⁵⁸ Diamond (1996: 228). Diamond cites Anscombe (1963a: 170).

just interested in showing that Lovibond's account is wrong, she also wants to explain *why* it is that it is tempting to go wrong as Lovibond does. To understand what issues underlie Lovibond's discussion, it helps to see her metaphysically homogeneous account of language as tying the question what ethics is to two other questions:

1. What is ethics? – Ethics is indicative discourse involving moral predicates.
2. What does it mean to talk about ethics? – Talking about ethics means using moral predicates in indicative discourse.
3. What is ethics about? – The features of reality which are captured by moral predicates.

Lovibond's metaphysically homogeneous account of language draws these three questions together. Her answer to 1 is simultaneously an answer to 2 and 3. The reason for splitting Lovibond's account up into these three questions is that all three questions are of interest for Diamond's argument. Diamond's approach suggests that Lovibond makes a mistake in providing an account of ethics which runs these three questions together. Diamond's main interest in Lovibond has to do with the role which question 3 plays in this structure. According to Diamond, the reason why Lovibond gives wrong answers to questions 1 and 2 is that she believes that she *must* give an answer to question 3. Lovibond's account is focused on moral predicates, because moral predicates give her a way (via her metaphysical homogeneity idea) to think of ethics as about something. She is determined to find a way for ethical statements to be fact-stating in the same sort of way as statements about physics. This is the aspect of cognitivism which she wants to salvage. A key purpose of Diamond's examples is to

undermine this attempt at its root by showing that asking what ethics is about leads into philosophical fantasy.⁵⁹ This is the core of her idea that ethics lacks a subject matter. Her examples aim to show that trying to answer question 3 is a mistake, which is supposed to enable a different, better way of thinking about questions 1 and 2.

In Section 6, I will say something about how Diamond might respond to questions 1 and 2. At present, I want to spend some time on Diamond's concerns about question 3. So far, I have undersold the analogy which Diamond draws between ethics and mathematics. I have presented mathematics as a counterexample to Lovibond's metaphysical homogeneity idea and then offered some examples of ethical discourse which does not involve moral predicates in order to undercut Lovibond's claim that moral predication is essential to ethics. However, the analogy between ethics and mathematics in fact plays a deeper role in Diamond. The analogy between ethics and mathematics is supposed to undercut the very idea that ethics is about something.

How it is possible for a proposition to be moral without describing moral properties, and how this relates to the philosophy of mathematics, is illustrated in an example from Shuli Barzilai's reading of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.⁶⁰ Diamond focuses on Barzilai's reading of the two sentences: 'A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.'⁶¹ Barzilai argues that, in the context of Woolf's narrative, these

⁵⁹ '[T]he hardness of realism is in not asking the questions; and then we shall not see Wittgenstein answering them either.' Diamond (1991a: 70).

⁶⁰ Barzilai (1995). Woolf (1930).

⁶¹ Diamond (1996: 227).

sentences are morally significant. This has to do with a contrast which Woolf makes between these sentences and words she earlier quoted from Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' speaks of a brigade of 600 men riding out to a doomed battle, with only few returning. One striking feature of the poem is the way in which it reduces the fighting men entirely to their being part of the 600. Even after the battle, the survivors are characterized as 'left of 600' and 'not the 600'.⁶² When Woolf reports the death of twenty or thirty young men in France, her narrative transcends the anonymity of Tennyson's 600, particularly when she describes the circumstances of the death of Andrew Ramsay. Barzilai argues that the point of these two sentences in Woolf's novel is to make a contrast with 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', writing that '[Woolf's] reference to 'twenty or thirty ... among them Andrew Ramsay' serves to underscore (because, and not in spite, of the inexact number) the importance of one particular life for one mother, one wife, or one friend.'⁶³ The interest of this example lies in the fact that it illustrates very clearly how the descriptive content of a sentence and its ethical function can diverge. Woolf's pair of sentences describes an event. It can be read as doing simply that. However, if the sentences are read as deliberately contrasting with Tennyson's poem, they accrue an additional moral significance, which lies in the sentences' use in this particular context, rather than their meaning. This parallels a point which Wittgenstein makes about mathematics. The proposition 'If a group of twenty and a group of ten people are brought together, there are thirty people.' can be seen either as a descriptive or as a mathematical proposition, either as making a claim about people, or as registering a certain inference pattern.⁶⁴

⁶² Tennyson (1912).

⁶³ Diamond (1996: 227).

⁶⁴ Diamond discusses this parallel at Diamond (1996: 227).

Diamond argues that Woolf's sentences constitute an analogous case in ethics, where one and the same pair of sentences can either be read as a description of the facts, or as expressive of a moral insight.

The central idea in Diamond's four examples of ethical discourse discussed so far is that whether or not a proposition belongs to ethics should be thought of as depending on its use on a particular occasion, not on what it is about. The example from Virginia Woolf makes this point particularly well because the ethical significance of Woolf's sentences clearly stems from their relation to 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', not from their subject matter. However, even if it is admitted that these propositions are ethical by virtue of their use, rather than what they are about, the subject matter issue is not completely settled, so long as it remains unclear what makes their use ethical. Might it not be the case that these uses are ethical uses only insofar as they can be related to moral properties?

Diamond raises this objection herself in the context of her first example: 'It might [...] be argued that the reader of *The Long Winter* is meant to recognize the moral property of bravery in the acts described. The absence of explicit moral terms in the story (so the argument would go) is entirely consistent with the idea that the recognition of moral properties is central in moral thought.'⁶⁵ The idea here is that even though *The Long Winter* does not involve moral predication, for the reader to recognize the story as morally significant is for the reader to recognise that the story could be told in a way

⁶⁵ Diamond (1996: 228).

which does involve moral predicates. We recognize the actions of the characters as moral, because we recognize them to be brave, compassionate, kind, etc. In response, Diamond tries to show that it is possible for there to be moral thought without *any* recourse to moral predication. She illustrates this point by modifying her first example, inviting us to imagine a society which has no words for moral properties. Moral thought, in this society, would be limited to the telling of stories such as *The Long Winter*. Children would be morally educated by being encouraged to behave 'like Almanzo' (one of the characters in the story), etc. According to Diamond there is no reason to think that there could not be such a society, which shows that we need not be able to tell a story about moral concepts in order to recognize a discourse as moral.

Here it is important to be clear on what exactly Diamond means by a society which lacks words for moral properties. Diamond does not seem to have in mind a society which lacks moral concepts altogether, for such a society would not have the concept 'moral' itself. While a society with no moral concepts at all might be conceivable, it would not help Diamond's argument. Imagine a society which has no moral concepts whatsoever, not even the concept 'moral'. There need not be anything wrong with our recognizing the stories they tell their children, encouraging them to be, for example, 'like Almanzo', as moral discourse. This fact, however, would only allow Diamond to establish a weaker claim than the claim she in fact wants to make. Diamond's example would show that moral thinking without moral concepts is possible, but it would not prove that it is possible to *identify* a discourse as moral without recourse to distinctively moral concepts. The fact that we, users of the concept 'moral', could identify the discourse of the imaginary society as moral does not show that the concept 'moral' can be made to

apply without being tied to moral properties. How could Diamond be sure that our recognizing 'Be like Almanzo!' as moral discourse would not depend on our characterizing what Almanzo does as brave, kind, heroic, etc.? After all, the fact that the imaginary society do not conceptualize Almanzo's actions as brave does not mean that we cannot recognize his bravery.

It seems as though Diamond wants to make the stronger claim that a society could have the concept of ethics without having any concepts for moral properties. She wants to drive a wedge between identifying a discourse as moral and having something to say about moral properties (her way of separating question 3 from questions 1 and 2). Her imaginary society view the telling of stories as moral education, but they do so without having any distinctively moral concepts. However, the question then arises what it means for Diamond's society's stories to be ethical. Diamond's wedge takes away a key resource in terms of which philosophers have tried to make sense of the concept of ethics: moral properties. How is the concept of ethics applied to a discourse if not via the recognition that that discourse stands in some sort of relation to moral features of reality? What is meant by calling *The Long Winter* a moral story? The more complete Diamond's attack on moral properties, the harder it becomes to understand what she means by the concept of ethics. This issue will be the central focus of Sections 5 and 6.

Diamond's fifth and final example, to which she devotes an entire section of WME, begins to highlight the potential wider significance of Diamond's claim that ethics lacks a subject-matter, as well as raising some further issues concerning what Diamond means by 'ethics', which makes it worth quoting in full:

Simone Weil suggests that one meditate on chance, chance that led to the meeting of one's father and mother, chance that led to one's being born. Suppose one is thinking what to do, and brings to that deliberation the thought "It is only through chance that I was born"; and suppose that one acts in the light that that thought casts. It may put what one values in a different perspective, helping one to recognize what is precious, and to accept its and one's own vulnerability to chance, its and one's own ephemeral existence; such recognition and acceptance may then inform one's action. What is brought into contact with the situation here is not a moral rule but a thought, a sentence[.]⁶⁶

In this fifth example, Diamond begins to show why it might be beneficial to have the sort of non-descriptive story *she* wants to tell about moral philosophy in place. What Diamond is interested in here is a phenomenon she calls guidance, exemplified in Weil's idea that it is good to act *in the light of* certain facts about chance. The idea of acting in the light of a thought, being guided by a thought, is of considerable philosophical interest.⁶⁷

For a thought to guide us is for the thought to stand in a certain relation to our actions – a relation which is supposed to be non-descriptive. Diamond connects 'acting in the light' of a thought with that thought *informing* our action. Spelling out what exactly a guiding relation between a thought and an action might look like is not easy. What does

⁶⁶ Diamond (1996: 230). For Weil's own meditation on chance, see Weil (1986: 297-98).

⁶⁷ Diamond's recent work in *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe* makes heavy use of the idea of being guided by a thought, see Diamond (2019).

it mean for a thought to inform an action? It is clear that Diamond is not interested in causal relations here.⁶⁸ The guiding thought need not be the cause of an action to stand in a guiding relation to it. However, the guiding connection between thought and action also seems too vague for the thought to be treated as a *reason* for the action to be performed.⁶⁹ It is very difficult to think of an action X, whose guiding relation to Weilian meditation on chance is properly expressed in the dialogue: 'Why did you do X?' – 'Because it is only through chance that I was born.'. The guiding thought is not idiomatically given as a direct response to a 'why'-question. And yet there is a sense in which it can constitute part of an indirect response to such a question. A story about meditations on chance might play into making a life-changing decision such as starting a family, moving to a different country, or changing careers. Such meditations might shape the outlook which enabled the decision, without thereby having to be thought of either as a cause or as a reason in favour of the decision. The guiding thought might be mentioned in a more extended answer to a 'why?'-question.⁷⁰

What might make being guided by the thought 'it is only through chance that I was born' ethically significant? Is it the thought's use or the thought's subject matter? Birth and chance are both topics that by their very nature have various connections with ethics, making it quite plausible to think of the thought as ethically significant by virtue of its subject matter. Diamond's way of opposing this idea is to invite us to think of the

⁶⁸ Acting in the light of a meditation on chance is not to be thought of as analogous to Anscombe's marching up and down because she is excited by some martial music. See Anscombe (1963b: §10).

⁶⁹ 'Reason' is here to be read with Anscombe as an answer to the question 'Why?' taken in a non-causal sense See Anscombe (1963b: §§1-22).

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that the guiding thought is more likely to be mentioned than used in the answer to a 'why?'-question.

thought as *guiding* our actions, rather than constituting a moral rule, which is her way of suggesting that the thought's moral significance does not come from what it is about, but from the use to which it is put in our thinking. The question, then, is why we should not think of the thought as a moral rule? Presumably because its relation to action is not so direct (the above point about it being implausible to construe the thought as a reason for action). The issue here is the following: the more direct the relation between a guiding thought and an action, the more tempting it will be to construe the thought as a moral rule, and hence as morally significant precisely because it is about something moral. Correspondingly, if the relation between guiding thought and action is less direct, the Diamondian idea that the moral significance of the thought comes from its use, not its meaning, will be more plausible. However, making the relation between thought and action less direct will raise the question what about the thought is supposed to be moral. Why think of a thought which only has a very tenuous relation to action as moral? While Diamond has an answer to the objection that her examples can be construed as somehow indirectly about moral properties, that answer forces upon her the question what *she* means by calling these examples ethical.

4. The Demarcation Claim – Lovibond's Revision and Mulhall's Critique

The above discussion shows how Lovibond's question about the subject matter of ethics obscures the phenomenon of guidance in its diverse forms. Lovibond's attempt to provide a non-metaphysical account of what ethics is about introduces a new kind of philosophical fantasy: the idea that moral thought can be demarcated by the use of moral concepts. Because she accepts the question what ethics is about as the starting

point for moral enquiry, Lovibond gives an implausible account of ethics as ‘discourse which involves distinctively moral concepts.’ Diamond exposes the fantasy by pointing to alternative modes of thought, which Lovibond's account misses. The difficulty that we now seem to be faced with is that, having rejected the question what ethics is about, we are left with the question what ethics is. I will discuss what Diamond might say in response to this question in Section 6. First, however, I will turn, in this and the following section, to different ways in which Diamond's critique of Lovibond has been taken up in the secondary literature.

Certain aspects of Diamond's argument against Lovibond's thought that ethics is about the features of reality that are captured by moral predicates have been widely acknowledged to be right. In particular, the thought that ethics can be demarcated by a specific set of moral concepts has been acknowledged to be a fantasy, even by many who are otherwise critical of Diamond's work in ethics.⁷¹ Lovibond herself now accepts that the attempt to reduce moral discourse to discourse involving moral predicates was too narrow.⁷² However, Lovibond's restatement of her views in *Ethical Formation* still seems to clash with Diamond's views. Despite acknowledging some of Diamond's criticisms, the later Lovibond keeps hold of a problematic philosophical realism. Lovibond's revised position in *Ethical Formation* is that while a discourse need not explicitly use moral predicates to be moral, its implicit structure must nonetheless involve moral concepts. While the original, strong demarcation claim is dropped, Lovibond still holds onto the idea that whether or not a discourse is ethical must be

⁷¹ See for example the critical discussion in Harcourt (2019), which I discuss in the next section.

⁷² See Lovibond (2002: 34-38).

fleshed out in terms of moral concepts. Stephen Mulhall, taking up Diamond's mantle, has forcefully criticized this idea, claiming that it misses the point of Diamond's initial objection. Examining their disagreement can help to bring into clearer view how Lovibond's ethics fails to be true to the realistic spirit precisely by attempting to keep hold of a form of philosophical realism.

Before turning to Mulhall's critique, it is important to recall why Lovibond finds it crucial to explain the ethical in terms of moral concepts. At the heart of Lovibond's whole philosophical project is a preoccupation with moral truth. Lovibond wants to preserve truth and objectivity in ethics, but without appealing to a transcendent metaphysics. Objectivity requires that the legitimacy of an utterance is not determined by the speaker herself. The natural move, if one wants to find structures which determine what is allowable independently of the judgment of any one person, is to look to inter-subjective agreement: 'The possibility of discourse about an objective world is determined by the fact of inter-subjective agreement; and conversely, where such agreement exists, the particular discourse grounded in it can properly be called 'objective', regardless of its subject-matter.'⁷³ This is what drives Lovibond to focus on moral concepts, which, as part of our shared language, can function as an inter-subjective standard of truth. In RIE, Lovibond holds that a discourse is moral insofar as it uses moral predicates. In EF, she drops this idea, thereby acknowledging the force of Diamond's examples of non-descriptive moral discourse. However, she remains exercised by the thought that for there to be objectivity in ethics, there must be

⁷³ Lovibond (1983: 42). See also Wittgenstein (1953: §242).

something external to the moral thinker which determines whether or not what they think or say fits into the sphere of the ethical. She expresses this thought as follows:

Since [my] approach conceives of the space of reasons as one mapped out for us by immersion in a culture and by initiation into an array of 'language games', the task that lies before it [...] is to convince us of the existence of a form of thought in which the skilled participant, in thinking as she does, is responding to 'the reasons that there are'; yet where this responsiveness does not seem to have any close linguistic counterpart in the shape of competence with 'a particular group of nouns and adjectives'.⁷⁴

The latter part of this quotation contains Lovibond's acknowledgement of Diamond's criticism. The former expresses her commitment to cashing out the objectivity of moral thought in terms of 'the reasons that there are' – *implicitly*, wherever these reasons are not immediately visible in a discourse. Lovibond's thinking here seems to run as follows: Objectivity requires that the truth of a matter is settled independently of the person entertaining the matter. There has to be something beyond his own judgment against which his judgment can be measured. Following her reading of Wittgenstein, Lovibond locates this external constraint upon moral thinking in the structure of our language. Where a discourse involves moral predicates there is explicit appeal to the structure of moral language. If a discourse is to be moral without using such predicates, this structure

⁷⁴ Lovibond (2002: 38).

must be involved implicitly, for it is the structure of moral language, encoding the logical relations between moral predicates, which guarantees the objectivity of moral thought.

Mulhall believes that Lovibond's focus on 'reasons that there are' misses the possibility of radical moral innovation, which is in many ways a central feature of Diamond's ethics.⁷⁵ Insofar as ethics is conceived of as a system which governs what possibilities of moral action there already are, it can seem as though the possibility of radical innovation is ruled out *prima facie*. The main example of radical moral innovation which Mulhall discusses comes from Diamond's reading of the *Crito* in 'Missing the Adventure'. In the *Crito*, Socrates explains to his friends that he cannot escape prison and execution, because to do so would be to disobey his parents and teachers. Mulhall writes:

This argument is not an attempt to render explicit an implicit but shared understanding of the Laws of Athens that is common both to Socrates and his friends; it is an attempt to redescribe the facts of Socrates' situation in such a way that an utterly original connection can be made with a familiar moral principle.⁷⁶

Socrates is morally innovating by connecting the principle that one ought to obey one's parents and teachers with the Laws of Athens. Mulhall thinks of such innovation as fundamentally different from a scenario in which a connection which is already implicit in a practice is made explicit. This sums up the disagreement between Lovibond and

⁷⁵ See Mulhall (2002).

⁷⁶ Mulhall (2002: 310).

Mulhall: Lovibond thinks that ethics is about coming to understand what is, in some sense, already there, whereas Mulhall believes that it is possible to take ethical thought in radically new directions. Mulhall offers the example from the *Crito* as a kind of test case, taking philosophy back from its abstract reasoning to the reality with which it is ostensibly concerned.

Mulhall's response to Lovibond can be seen as working out the central idea from Diamond's discussion of the realistic spirit, which is the focus of the following quotation:

Realism in philosophy, the hardest thing, is open-eyedly giving up the quest for such an elucidation, the demand that a philosophical account of what I mean make clear how it is fixed, out of all the possible continuations, out of some real semantic space, *which I mean*.⁷⁷

When Lovibond conceives of ethics as a form of thought in which the participant is responsive to the 'reasons that there are,' she seems to be reaffirming such a demand: she conceives of the moral landscape as fixed in a structure of 'reasons that there are,' which it is up to the philosopher to bring into proper view. Mulhall aims to show that this is a mistake by pointing to a case which is obscured by Lovibond's account. Talk of 'reasons that there are' is misplaced when describing Socrates' moral innovation. It is a remnant of the kind of philosophical realism to which the realistic spirit is a response.

⁷⁷ Diamond (1991a: 69).

The problem with this philosophical realism is that it obscures moral possibilities. By suggesting that for a proposition to be ethical, it must be connected, explicitly or implicitly, to the space of reasons, Lovibond renders ethics surveyable. She demarcates ethics by assigning the subject a clear task and purpose: the description of the space of reasons. If Mulhall and Diamond are right and there are dimensions of moral thought which are not captured by this vision, Lovibond's account becomes an obstacle to a proper appreciation of the complexity of the moral landscape. Her account is a fantasy in that it posits a subject matter, where no subject matter is in fact to be had.

It is striking that the dialectic between Mulhall and Lovibond about the space of reasons takes exactly the same form as the earlier dialectic between Diamond and Lovibond about moral predicates. Lovibond puts forward accounts of the structure of moral thought, Diamond and Mulhall demonstrate that these accounts obscure important possibilities. The thought seems to be that there is something unrealistic about the very idea that one could give a general account of the structure of moral thought. Anyone who tries will prioritize some aspects of ethics and obscure others. As Diamond puts it in 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is':

No one knows what the subject is; most widely agreed accounts of it depend on suppositions that are not obvious and that reflect particular evaluations and views of the world, of human nature, and of what it is to speak, think, write, or read about the world.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Diamond (1991b: 380).

Are we to take away from this that there is nothing positive to be said in answer to the question what ethics is? Is this the upshot of Diamond's claim that ethics lacks a subject matter? In the next section, I will examine a recent dispute between Harcourt and Kuusela about how Diamond's no-subject-matter-claim is to be interpreted, in order then, in Section 6, to make some suggestions as to how Diamond's thinking about ethics in a realistic spirit might further be developed.

5. The Demarcation Claim – Harcourt and Kuusela

Edward Harcourt has recently argued that ‘a Wittgensteinian moral philosophy—though not perhaps the only possible one—would be an investigation of the general facts of nature that underlie our possession of distinctively moral concepts’⁷⁹, following Wittgenstein's general methodological remark that ‘what we have to mention in order to explain the significance [...] of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature’.⁸⁰ He reads Mulhall's and Diamond's responses to Lovibond as opposing this way of applying Wittgenstein's philosophical ideas to ethics. In this section, I want to explore to what extent Mulhall and Diamond⁸¹ do oppose Harcourt's ostensibly Wittgensteinian approach to ethics, thus concretizing their understanding of what it means to do ethics in a realistic spirit.

⁷⁹ Harcourt (2019: 47).

⁸⁰ Wittgenstein (1953: §142).

⁸¹ Harcourt treats Mulhall and Diamond's views together throughout the paper. I will hereafter just write Diamond, but mean for my remarks to apply also to Mulhall, unless otherwise stated.

Harcourt agrees with Diamond that ethics cannot be demarcated by reference to moral concepts – a view he calls expansionism.⁸² He believes that a discourse need not involve any moral words to qualify as moral, which entails what Harcourt calls the no-demarcation claim. He cites Mulhall's phrasing of this claim:

[W]e cannot “demarcate the legitimate subject-matter of moral philosophy by identifying certain obviously moral concepts or words, and examining the ways in which they are used” (Mulhall 2002, 304).⁸³

This way of putting the no-demarcation claim corresponds to Diamond's criticism of Lovibond's position in RIE. It is not, however, clear whether it equally targets Lovibond's revised position in EF. It is one thing to claim that the ethical cannot be demarcated *by reference to a set of concepts of words*, quite another to claim that the ethical cannot be demarcated *at all*. The claim that ethics has a subject matter is of concern for Diamond, because it obscures certain important features of moral discourse from view (radical moral innovation being one such feature). Diamond believes that *any* demarcation of the ethical has this consequence. To what extent Harcourt can accept such a more general no-demarcation claim is a central issue to be addressed in this section.

⁸² Harcourt (2019: 49-50).

⁸³ Harcourt (2019: 50).

However, Harcourt locates his main disagreement with Diamond elsewhere. Harcourt believes that Diamond holds that there are no distinctively moral concepts, quoting the following remark in support of his interpretation:

We cannot. . . say that *these* are the words. . . that can have this character. If a sentence or image or word has this character, it arises not through its content but from its use on a particular occasion.⁸⁴

If Harcourt is right, then the reason Diamond thinks that ethics cannot be demarcated by reference to a set of distinctively moral concepts is that there are no such concepts. He then argues that there *are* distinctively moral concepts, and that there is reason to think that it would be fruitful for philosophers to study them, without claiming that such a study would exhaust the domain of moral philosophy (due to the truth of expansionism).

Harcourt's argument brings to light interesting tensions which emerge from Diamond and Lovibond's dispute about the subject matter of ethics. Before turning to the details here, there is a problem in Harcourt's general argumentative strategy which needs to be addressed. In a recent attempt to defend Diamond against Harcourt, Oskari Kuusela has argued that to read Diamond as claiming that there are no distinctively moral concepts is uncharitable, because the view is 'clearly empirically false' and difficult to motivate philosophically.⁸⁵ This seems true: 'kindness', 'murder', 'love' and 'ethics' do

⁸⁴ Diamond (1996: 248).

⁸⁵ Kuusela (2021: 85).

seem to be moral concepts, however they are used. Given that the above quotation is the only direct support Harcourt finds for his interpretation in Diamond's writings, it does seem implausible to attribute this view to her.

I want to suggest that the reason Harcourt attributes to Diamond the bold position that there are no distinctively moral concepts is that it is otherwise difficult to see why Diamond's approach to moral philosophy would be opposed to Harcourt's. If there are distinctively moral concepts, then surely it is worthwhile for philosophers to study them. Kuusela suggests that the disagreement between Diamond and Harcourt is that Harcourt wants to *reduce* moral philosophy to the study of moral concepts.⁸⁶ But Harcourt never says that he wants to carry out such a reduction. All he says is that the study of moral concepts can be a fruitful way of doing Wittgensteinian moral philosophy. Hence, to charge Harcourt with reductionism seems just as uncharitable as pinning on Diamond the view that there are no moral concepts. The challenge, then, is to explain the methodological disagreement between Diamond and Harcourt without imputing to Diamond an implausible view about the (non-)existence of moral concepts, and without imputing to Harcourt a simple reductionism.

Harcourt makes an interesting suggestion about the relation between moral concepts and moral thinking in general. His account begins with an analogy between moral concepts and mental concepts. Harcourt argues that a discourse can be about mental phenomena without employing distinctively mental concepts. Indeed, a whole language

⁸⁶ Kuusela (2021: 87).

might lack mental concepts, without thereby being barred from talking about minded phenomena. Here is Harcourt's example:

- 1) 'Smith entered the living room but a burglar was there, and he fled.'⁸⁷
- 2) 'Smith *decided* to enter the living room and did so, but when he *noticed* someone there whose *intention* he *understood* to be to burgle the house, he *decided* to flee, and did.'⁸⁸

Harcourt argues that we do not need the mental vocabulary of the second narrative to understand the first narrative 'as a description of a minded creature's intelligent behaviour'.⁸⁹ Whether a proposition has a mental subject matter need not be determined by the concepts used in the proposition. However, the distinctively mental vocabulary in 2) allows us to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomena under discussion in 1). Harcourt suggests that we encounter the same situation in ethics. There need not be any distinctive moral vocabulary for there to be ethically significant discourse. However, a distinctive moral vocabulary can make for a more sophisticated kind of ethical understanding. Harcourt believes that virtue-words fit the same mould as the mental vocabulary of 2). Indeed, you can describe a kind action without using the concept 'kind'. But any talk about kindness, whether or not the concept is being used, seems to be ethical by virtue of the fact that kindness is involved in whatever the talk is about. This suggests that kindness is indeed a moral concept.

⁸⁷ Harcourt (2019: 52).

⁸⁸ Harcourt (2019: 53).

⁸⁹ Harcourt (2019: 53).

Harcourt wants to go further than this. Not only does he want to say that there are moral concepts (a claim which, it seems, may well be compatible with Diamond's approach to ethics), he further wants to say that wherever a discourse is moral, distinctively moral concepts can be introduced to mark it as such.⁹⁰ His thinking, roughly, runs as follows: The fact that there are ethical phenomena implies that there are ways of making connections between these phenomena, which explain why it is that we call them all ethical. There is no reason to think that these connections cannot be put into words: Where we see patterns, we can come up with words to describe them. Hence, wherever a discourse is ethical, it ought to be possible to introduce a vocabulary which explains *how* it is ethical. So, Harcourt makes two claims about ethics: 1) there are distinctively moral concepts. 2) Wherever there is moral thinking, it is possible to introduce distinctively moral concepts. Taken together, these claims suggest that it will be a very fruitful path for moral philosophy to investigate moral concepts, which, although they do not *demarcate* the ethical, are bound up very closely with all moral thinking.

There are two main lines of objection one might pursue against Harcourt. The first has to do with his assumption that the employment of a concept (in this case 'ethical') requires the fulfilment of some sort of condition of employment. Harcourt's idea seems to be that if you want to call something ethical, you must have a reason for calling it ethical – it must be possible, at least in principle, to come up with an explanation as to why or how what you are calling ethical is ethical. However, it is not clear that the *general* claim that *every* use of the concept 'ethical' must be explainable in terms of

⁹⁰ Harcourt (2019: 57).

some other concepts, if not existing ones, then made up ones, is justified. Maybe, on occasion, all that someone can say is that a particular phenomenon struck them as ethically significant, without being able further to specify what exactly about that phenomenon was ethical. Diamond might have something like this in mind when she discusses the impact that Simone Weil's proposition about chance might have on a person. It may be that the best explanation one can give here is: 'it's ethical, don't you see!?', which is a way of refusing explanation.

Harcourt seems to want to say that whenever the concept 'ethical' is extended from familiar cases to new ones, it must be possible to explain why it can be so extended – it must be possible to point to similarities, patterns, lines of projection.⁹¹ But can the projection not sometimes be more fundamental than any pattern on which it might be based? Insofar as Harcourt is making the general claim that moral concepts can *always* be introduced to mark a particular phenomenon as ethically significant, he seems to be claiming too much. On occasion, the concept 'ethical' itself might be projectible without the possibility of further explanation. It is, at least, not clear why such a scenario should be ruled out *prima facie*. This might be the sort of thing which Kuusela has in mind when he accuses Harcourt of reductionism. The thought that it *must* be possible to introduce a moral concept to explain a projection of the concept 'ethical' seems to take the form of a philosophical requirement or constraint, hence risking a kind of unrealism.

⁹¹ See Cavell (1979: Chapter 7) for an account of projection.

The second line of objection against Harcourt takes issue with Harcourt's focus on description. The central thrust of Diamond's critique of Lovibond was the claim that it is wrong to think of ethics as inherently descriptive. But Harcourt's central claim is that sometimes, in ethics, it can be the philosopher's task to describe how moral concepts function. Harcourt is not a reductionist insofar as he admits that an investigation of moral concepts will not necessarily offer a complete account of ethics. However, he wants to argue that ethics *can* involve the description of the function of distinctively moral concepts. Insofar as ethics involves such a description, it seems to be about something (namely about the moral concepts which it describes). But then it seems as though there is a sense in which ethics does have a subject matter. So this seems to be where Diamond and Harcourt disagree. Harcourt is charitable towards Diamond in that he acknowledges that moral thought need not be descriptive. But he ultimately wants to argue that moral thinking can always be described, if not with the concepts we already have, then with concepts we make up – and if moral thought can be described, then an investigation of the concepts by means of which it is described seems to be an excellent starting point for moral philosophy. The crucial question here is what exactly is meant by description and what the description of moral discourse by means of moral concepts is supposed to amount to. Two possible readings of Harcourt put him at odds with Diamond here. A third reading, which I argue would be the most charitable, suggests that Harcourt and Diamond do not in fact disagree about anything substantial.

One way of spelling out a central difference between Harcourt and Diamond is to charge Harcourt with being engaged in a kind of demarcation of the ethical not by concepts, but by subject matter. In Lovibond's original position, moral concepts and the subject

matter of ethics were equivocated. As we saw, Harcourt follows Diamond in rejecting this position. However, Harcourt wants to hold onto the idea that ethics has a subject matter. This is analogous to the move Lovibond makes in EF where she holds onto her idea that ethics is about something by making reference to a 'space of reasons that there are'. While Harcourt does not speak of reasons that there are, his idea that wherever there is moral discourse, distinctively moral concepts can be invented to describe that discourse seems to draw on similar imagery: the idea here, again, seems to be of the moral sphere as something that is somehow there to be described. Insofar as Harcourt's position propagates this picture, it will be susceptible to Mulhall's Diamondian critique, discussed in the previous section. The idea that moral philosophy is in the business of describing structures which are in some sense already there would tie moral philosophy to these structures, thereby engaging in a kind of demarcation of the ethical. Such demarcation would be unrealistic in the same way as Lovibond's position in EF, because, like Lovibond's position, it would rule out *prima facie* the possibility of radical moral innovation. A moral philosophy which only describes what is already there cannot move beyond already existing patterns of thought.

In the face of this unrealism objection, a second way of spelling out the difference between Harcourt and Diamond is to drop any ideas about demarcation, and instead to think of Harcourt's appeal to description as an attempt to achieve a kind of meta-ethical neutrality. The central purpose of Harcourt's paper is to argue for a particular method in moral philosophy: one which descriptively investigates concepts. One reason why such a method might be appealing is that it seems to be ethically neutral, and hence objective. Harcourt's analogy between the moral and the mental can be seen as

supporting such a reading. It may, on occasion, be up for dispute whether or not somebody *decided* to do something, but it is not generally up for dispute how one finds out whether or not somebody decided to do something. While there may be disagreement in a given case as to whether or not the criteria for the employment of a mental concept are fulfilled, there is normally far less possibility of disagreement concerning the question what the criteria are, and even less possibility of disagreement concerning the question how one finds out what the criteria are. By drawing an analogy between the mental and the moral, Harcourt seems to want to suggest that something similar is the case in ethics. While there can be moral disagreement on particular issues, underlying structural questions about moral discourse are not similarly up for debate. Moral discourse simply functions in a certain way, and it is the philosopher's task to describe this functioning neutrally, in order to pave the way for a better understanding of specific contentious issues.⁹² The Diamondian objection to the idea that there can be a kind of methodological neutrality in ethics is easily stated and a constant theme in her work: how you think about ethics is going to be ethically significant, at whichever level your thinking operates. Someone who objects to Harcourt's method in moral philosophy will be involved not only in a philosophical disagreement, but in an *ethical* disagreement with Harcourt. Such disagreements can run extremely deep, as Diamond's work in papers such as 'Losing Your Concepts' shows. Hence, while this reading of Harcourt, like the reading above, allows for a very clear contrast between Harcourt's and Diamond's positions, it is difficult to defend against potential Diamondian objections.⁹³

⁹² Wittgensteinian support for this sort of thought might be thought to come from propositions such as: 'If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.' Wittgenstein (1953: §128).

⁹³ See especially Mulhall (2022) for an attack on the idea of meta-ethical neutrality.

Both of the above readings pin on Harcourt a particular idea of what it means to describe something. In particular, they both associate description with a kind of neutrality. However, it is far from obvious that description is inherently neutral. And indeed, if one examines Harcourt's other work on moral concepts, it is clear that Harcourt is very much aware that the concepts in terms of which one thinks about the world will have an impact on one's thinking, which can put one at odds with people who use different concepts.⁹⁴ Allowing for the possibility that description of moral phenomena in terms of moral concepts can and perhaps must be ethically loaded makes it possible for Harcourt to avoid the objections brought forward against the two readings above. If a description can be radically novel, is the possibility of radical moral innovation not allowed for? Can moral innovation not be thought of as a radical redescription of the existing moral landscape? And what is to stop Harcourt from thinking of his proposed descriptive methodology in ethics as ethically charged? Harcourt does not, after all, motivate his position by appealing to concerns about neutrality. However, if one makes this conciliatory move, it is once again unclear how exactly Harcourt's position is supposed to differ from Diamond's. If Harcourt, read as above, were to admit that description of the ethical is not ethically neutral, thereby accommodating the possibility of radical moral innovation as radical redescription (and hence reconfiguration) of the moral landscape, there would again seem to be nothing separating him from Diamond. Harcourt, as we have now read him, seems to be in complete agreement with Diamond,

⁹⁴ See Harcourt and Thomas (2013).

except that he thinks that ethics can be said to have a subject matter, which Diamond so adamantly claims is not the case.

Given that we have followed Kuusela in his claim that Diamond does not deny that there are moral concepts, it is tempting at this point, having read Harcourt so charitably, to accuse Diamond of confusion. Maybe there just is no sensible way of cashing out her claim that ethics does not have a subject matter. Maybe her position is empty, and Harcourt's disagreement simply a defence of our ordinary way of speaking. In order to defend Diamond against this confusion charge, I want, for the last part of this section, to focus on the link between Diamond's no-subject-matter-claim and the realistic spirit. It is notable that the realistic spirit, which Diamond herself presents as the key to understanding her view that ethics lacks a subject matter, is not mentioned at all in Harcourt's discussion. I want to suggest that this oversight is the reason for Harcourt's misreading of Diamond as denying that there are moral concepts, and also the reason why, from the Harcourtian perspective I just elaborated, Diamond's position looks to be confused.

All the above objections to Harcourt suggest that there might be a view akin to Lovibond's at work in his philosophy: a view which holds that there is a space of fixed possibilities which it is the task of ethics to describe. As indicated in Section 4, it is this picture which the realistic spirit targets. However, if one is sympathetic to Diamond and charitable to Harcourt, one *can* read his embracing of expansionism as an acknowledgment of the shortcomings of Lovibondian philosophical realism. Even so, it would have been helpful had Harcourt addressed these issues more clearly, because,

without more contextualisation, Harcourt's emphasis on description does seem to run counter to the realistic spirit.

Diamond's realistic spirit in ethics has an essentially critical dimension. To be realistic is to oppose philosophical fantasy, which is an inherently dialogical process. Harcourt misses this dimension of Diamond's thought and as a result pins on her the view that there are no moral concepts. The point of the realistic spirit being a *spirit*, not a view, is that it does not have a single determinate formulation. Diamond is not setting out to defend a particular ethical position as opposed to Lovibond. Instead, it is her project to call attention to important modes of moral thinking, which are obscured by those aspects in Lovibond's work which constitute philosophical fantasies. The above discussion of possible Diamondian objections to Harcourt indicates where Harcourt himself might be thought to have fallen prone to such fantasies. But even if Harcourt is read as agreeing with Diamond on all the contentious issues, concerning projections of the concept of ethics, description and meta-ethical neutrality, his discussion still overlooks the fundamental point of Diamond's work in ethics, which is not primarily to articulate a particular conception of what the subject is, but to criticise fantasy in order to enable us to see more clearly.

This explains why Kuusela accuses Harcourt of reductionism. Harcourt is not a reductionist, but the fact that he fails to acknowledge the critical dimension of Diamond's thought suggests that his own proposed Wittgensteinian method in ethics is not sufficiently sensitive to its own potential for occluding important phenomena from view. If Diamond's criticism of Lovibond is right, then much moral thinking is most

fruitfully thought of not as describing any subject matter, but as contributing to the way in which we live our lives by guiding our thoughts and actions in one direction or another. It is of course right that the phenomenon of guidance can itself be described, maybe with new moral concepts of the sort that Harcourt envisages. But sometimes setting out to describe something can lead one to overlook important features of the case at hand. Somebody who tries to describe the features that make Weil's remarks on guidance morally significant might *thereby* destroy their guiding effect, for example if the attempt to become more articulate about what it is that is significant about chance fails to yield a sufficiently inspiring result.

Insofar as Harcourt wants to make articulacy, or the possibility of articulation, a condition for moral intelligibility, he seems to bring a philosophical realism to the discussion, which holds that wherever there is moral significance, there is something that can be described as morally significant by means of a distinctively moral vocabulary. It is against this confidence in one's own preconceptions about what it means to deem something morally significant that the realistic spirit's critical dimension is directed.

6. Realism and Articulacy in Diamond⁹⁵

Harcourt's emphasis on moral concepts suggests that he wants to keep hold of the idea that ethics is about something. Pace Harcourt, Diamond never argues that the description of moral concepts is *always* an inappropriate method in moral philosophy,

⁹⁵ This section has been published in Burleigh (2024b: 112-117), with some alterations.

but she does warn that making description central obscures important phenomena such as guidance. Harcourt is a somewhat unhelpful interlocutor in that he does not address the realistic spirit in his criticism of Diamond, thereby missing the underlying motivation of Diamond's remarks against Lovibond. However, Harcourt's project points to an interesting tension in the realistic spirit, which I want to develop and begin to address in this final section.

Diamond's claim that ethics lacks a subject matter is addressed against a particular kind of philosophical fantasy: the fantasy that ethics can be built around the idea that there exists a given moral reality which it is the task of philosophers to describe. In Section 3, I presented Lovibond's account of ethics as simultaneously answering three questions: 1. 'What is ethics?', 2. 'What does it mean to talk about ethics?' and 3. 'What is ethics about?' and traced the problematic fantasy back to the question what ethics is about. Thinking about ethics in terms of that question obscures the moral significance of Diamond's five examples of moral discourse which are not *about* anything moral. Lovibond's later work (Section 4) and Harcourt's discussion (Section 5) explored different ways in which the idea of description might be kept central in ethics, but they were both shown to miss the critical dimension of the realistic spirit. Is this an accident?

As noted in Chapter 1, Diamond's realistic spirit does two things: it dissolves philosophical fantasies and it articulates alternative modes of thinking which had been obscured by the fantasies in question. To the extent that Lovibond and Harcourt remain captives of the fantasies which Diamond attempts to dissolve, it is no wonder that they do not acknowledge the full thrust of her work. However, there is reason to worry that

Diamond has not done her critical task well-enough. The problem in Harcourt and Lovibond is that they hold onto the question what ethics is about despite the fact that this question was shown, by Diamond, to get in the way of appreciating various important moral phenomena. But the reason why they keep hold of the question need not be that they are in the grip of a particular picture of moral reality as given. It might instead be the case that Lovibond and Harcourt see the descriptive dimension as the only way of making sense of the questions what ethics is and what it means to talk about ethics. These are questions which Diamond herself must take seriously, because her criticism of those who defend the idea that ethics has a subject matter rests on the claim that there are various *ethical* phenomena which are non-descriptive. Is it possible to say something about what makes these phenomena ethical, without falling back on the idea that ethics has a subject matter?

Here it is important to note that Diamond's own work in ethics has a descriptive dimension. Part of dissolving philosophical fantasies is to articulate different possibilities. This articulation process offers its own sketches of what ethics is, as exemplified in Diamond's claims that ethics lacks a subject-matter, ethics can be fruitfully compared to mathematics, *The Long Winter* is a book about ethics, guidance can be an important moral phenomenon, etc. These aspects of Diamond's work do seem to fit with Harcourt's idea that moral philosophy should follow Wittgenstein's remark that 'what we have to mention in order to explain the significance [...] of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature'.⁹⁶ Understanding the significance of a concept

⁹⁶ Wittgenstein (1953: §142).

often requires describing the background against which the concept is situated, which connects with the Wittgensteinian idea that very often, the best way to understand the meaning of a word or sentence is to look to its use.

The great challenge is to articulate what one means by the concept of ethics, without in so doing succumbing to philosophical fantasy. In Chapter 1, I suggested that Diamond's 'criss-cross' method of philosophical writing is an attempt to achieve this delicate balance. Diamond does not attempt to provide a single, unified account of ethics, but moves across a far-reaching territory, exposing fantasies where she finds them, and sketching alternatives bit by bit. Is it possible to say something summative about Diamond's approach which might help critics such as Lovibond and Harcourt to appreciate the critical thrust of the realistic spirit, without tossing them into a void without moral concepts where nothing at all can be said about the nature of ethics?

One way to answer this question would be to take Diamond's analogy between mathematics and ethics to hold also for the role which the concepts of mathematics and ethics play in relation to their respective subjects. The concept of mathematics is more or less a label for a certain set of activities. This means that the role which the concept of mathematics tends to play in our thinking is very much a descriptive role. Its purpose is to draw various activities together under a common heading. The concept of ethics might be thought to play a similar role. When Diamond calls her examples from Section 3 ethical, she may be trying to indicate that they belong together with questions about how to live one's life, issues concerning the distribution of important goods, certain questions about love, the relation between parents and children, our treatment of non-

human animals, etc. The concept of ethics can be understood as a descriptive term bringing all these various features of human life together under a single heading. The point of Diamond's argument in WME would then be that it is wrong to assume that for a given kind of discourse rightly to be describable as ethical, it must itself involve the description of moral properties.

It is, however, very difficult to make this account work without falling back on the idea that ethics has a subject matter. Granted that a discourse can be ethical without describing any moral properties, i.e., a proposition can be ethical by virtue of its use, does recognising this use as ethical not require identifying its moral features?⁹⁷ If it does, this seems to leave us, again, with the idea that ethics is about something: the moral features of reality. So, if the concept of ethics is to be a descriptive concept but ethics is not supposed to be about anything, it seems as though Diamond has to find a way of showing that a discourse can be ethical without exemplifying anything one might call moral features (beyond the feature of being ethical, that is). But then how is she to face the question what it means to call something ethical?

As suggested in Section 5, one option might be to appeal to *Philosophical Investigations* §1: 'explanations come to an end somewhere'.⁹⁸ Not every explanatory demand is legitimate. Hence, Diamond might reject the claim that we must be able to give an explanation as to how the phenomena she discusses in her examples can rightly come to be identified as ethical. She might argue that they are obvious cases of the ethical,

⁹⁷ This is Harcourt's position.

⁹⁸ Wittgenstein (1953: §1).

that calling them ethical is simply something we do. There are indeed instances in which demanding an explanation for the application of a concept suggests philosophical confusion (or an inability properly to speak the language in question). It seems questionable, however, whether Diamond's uses of the concept of ethics are obvious in this sort of way. It is quite normal for philosophers to deny that the sorts of phenomena which Diamond wants to call ethical are ethical. Putting down such fundamental disagreements as to what should be counted as ethics merely to philosophical confusion would seem to be rather optimistic. The conflict seems to run deeper than this.

A better answer to the question what it means for Diamond's examples to be ethical can be given by construing the concept of ethics as a family resemblance concept.⁹⁹ Family resemblance is a natural idea to reach for in the context of Diamond's ethics, given that Wittgenstein's remarks on family resemblance are an attack on what he calls 'craving for generality'¹⁰⁰. Thinking of ethics as a family resemblance concept allows us to do away with the idea that there must be something general to be said as to when the concept of ethics can be applied. If ethics is a family resemblance concept, what renders its application legitimate must be judged on a case-by-case basis. The basic idea behind family resemblance concepts is that there is no single story to be told determining what the concept means. A family resemblance concept's unity is constituted by a web of similarities between its various applications with no single story drawing all the uses together.

⁹⁹ Wittgenstein (1953: §§65-78).

¹⁰⁰ Wittgenstein (1958: 17-19).

How would thinking of ethics as a family resemblance concept affect Diamond's examples? Recall Diamond's imaginary society, who acquire their concept of ethics through stories such as *The Long Winter* and have no distinctively moral concepts, other than the concept of ethics itself. Children raised in this culture learn to recognise certain stories as ethical (presumably those which involve characters' doing something 'very fine' etc.). They also learn to see conversations about the stories' characters – what they do, whether they should be copied, whether they get what they deserve – as ethical conversations. The family resemblance idea is that, given sufficient exposure to such ethical stories and conversations, the children will learn to identify new stories and contexts as ethical ones. They will be able to do so by spotting relevant similarities between the old and the new stories. The crucial question for the subject-matter issue is what it means to spot such similarities. If to recognise relevant similarities between the different instances of ethical discourse requires identifying ethical properties in each instance, we seem to be landed once again with the idea that ethics has a subject-matter. Ethics will be about a set of interrelated properties which can be called moral. This worry is particularly acute given what Diamond says when explaining how her guidance example is ethical. Diamond writes that Weil's meditations on chance can be ethical because they 'put what one values in a different perspective, helping one to recognize what is precious'.¹⁰¹ Diamond renders the concept of ethics applicable to the example in question by characterizing the example as exhibiting moral features such as a change of perspective on value. The worry here is that there is some sense in which talk about ethics will after all reduce to talk about moral features of reality.

¹⁰¹ Diamond (1996: 230).

This worry can be avoided if the family resemblance idea is understood correctly. There are two points to be made here:

i) Family resemblance concepts do not depend on any one property or set of properties.

It need not be specifiable in advance of any particular application of a concept *what* similarities allow for an application of the concept. When Wittgenstein writes that there is no single property which all games have in common, because the concept's unity is constituted by a web of family resemblances, he should not be read as meaning that the concept of a game is reducible to a certain set of properties, a relevant number of which has to be instantiated by an activity for it to be called a game. What constitutes a significant similarity here is something that competent speakers can judge on a case-by-case basis. There is no antecedent truth to the matter. There may even be some divergence in judgment and such divergence need not be settleable.

ii) Once a similarity, or set of similarities has been identified enabling the application of a family resemblance concept to a new case, it would be a mistake to think of the concept as describing those specific aspects of the case in question. The meaning of a family resemblance concept, when used to refer to a particular instantiation, does not reduce to the properties which enabled its application. If somebody is asked why she wants to call ring-a-ring-a-roses a game, she might respond that its purpose is amusement, that there are rules and that it involves several people playing together. This does not mean that for ring-a-ring-a-roses to be a game is for it to instantiate these properties. It is in virtue of these properties that we call it a game, but what we mean by calling it a game is nothing other than *that it is a game*.

With the family resemblance idea in mind, we can tell a story about the concept of ethics which explains why it is tempting to think of the concept as somehow about moral features of reality. Applying the concept of ethics to any particular case requires being able to tell a story which highlights how the case is similar to other instances of what we call ethical. It is in virtue of such similarities that the concept can have application. However, point i) above shows that these similarities need not be moral properties. An action can be characterized as relevantly similar to the actions of Almanzo in *The Long Winter* and thereby be recognised as ethical without anything distinctively moral being mentioned (which was the point of Diamond's imaginary society example). What is more, even if an action is recognized as moral in virtue of some moral feature which it seems to have (such as in Diamond's guidance example), there is no reason to think that its ethical significance reduces to this feature, which point ii) shows. The meaning of a family resemblance concept does not reduce to the properties in virtue of which it applies to a particular case. If ethics is a family resemblance concept, there is nothing reductive about characterizing instances of moral discourse as ethical by appealing to features which are naturally construed as moral. The family resemblance idea enables us to see the concept of ethics as describing Diamond's examples, without thereby committing Diamond to the view that to be ethical is to instantiate moral properties.

The idea that ethics is a family resemblance concept resolves the issue as to how Diamond can help herself to the concept of ethics in her discussion of the examples without falling back on the idea that ethics has a subject matter. However, it also suggests the possibility of thinking about the concept of ethics in a way which goes beyond description altogether. A family resemblance concept can not only describe a

family of objects, it can also have a family of uses. This allows us to ask, for example, whether the concept of ethics might itself fruitfully be thought of as a guiding concept in Diamond's sense. There is good reason to think that investigation of this and similar questions about the use of the concept of ethics might be very fruitful. The idea that the concept of ethics can have a guiding function allows for a way of making sense of the idea of 'seeing something in an ethical light' which does not reduce to a set of descriptive claims. This might be the key to understanding the ethics of writers such as G.K. Chesterton and the early Wittgenstein, both of whom seem to want to think of ethics as an approach to life as a whole, rather than as a label for any specific phenomenon or set of phenomena.¹⁰² If one had to express their thinking about ethics in descriptive terms, it would be tempting to ascribe to them the claim that everything is ethical. But such a claim would be vacuous. If we are not to dismiss the ethics of such writers either as confused, or as a roundabout way of expressing more basic insights which we can paraphrase in descriptive language, an alternative approach is required. A construal of 'seeing something in an ethical light' which does not reduce to a story about seeing things *as ethical* would be an excellent starting point for such an approach.

It seems, then, as though an answer *can* be given to the question what ethics is, without relying on the idea that ethics has a subject matter, and without obscuring the phenomenon of guidance. This answer is more of a directive for further investigation than a determinate account, and in taking this transient form, it keeps faith with the

¹⁰² Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* goes so far as to rule out the possibility of describing anything in the world as ethical. His use of the concept of ethics in the *Tractatus* is restricted to making this point, which construes the ethical as manifesting in one's relation to the world as a whole. (For Diamond's discussion as to how this thought is ethically significant by being self-professedly nonsensical, see Diamond (2000).) For an introduction to Chesterton's ethics, see Chesterton (1909).

realistic spirit. It is an attempt to capture, without pretending to resolve, the central tension between the commitment to exposing fantasy and the commitment to articulating diverse phenomena, which jointly characterize the realistic spirit. It takes seriously Diamond's critics, who worry that Diamond's work does not offer enough of a positive characterization of ethics, while remaining sensitive to the opposite concern that every attempt to say something positive about ethics is at risk of falling into fantasy.

Chapter 3: Realistic Epiphanies?

In Chapter 2, I began to link the realistic spirit with ethics. Diamond's work in ethics was shown to involve two interrelated strands: 1) Diamond exposes the idea that ethics has a subject matter as a philosophical fantasy; 2) Diamond articulates examples of non-descriptive moral thinking, thereby characterizing what ethics is, if *not* a distinctive domain of thought with a distinctive subject matter. The relation between these two strands is typical of the realistic spirit: a fantasy is exposed as such by articulating modes of thinking which it obscures. The challenge for the realistic spirit is that the attempt to articulate alternatives to fantasy can breed fantasy of its own, which has made Diamond very cautious in her positive characterizations of ethics. Diamond does little more than to *list* examples. I have suggested that it might be possible to do more, by indicating how these different examples hang together through a structure of resemblances. But what exactly are the resemblances in question? In the rest of this thesis, I aim to make some progress with this question. How might we go about answering it, without generating new fantasies, thereby compromising the realistic spirit? Two contemporary moral philosophers, who have done work in a similar spirit to Diamond's, albeit in a very different form and context, can help here: Sophie Grace Chappell and Charles Taylor.

Chappell's work in ethics is the central concern of this chapter. Chappell's recent attempt to construct an ethics of experience on the basis of the concept of epiphany can be seen as related to Diamond's discussion of guidance. I have suggested that the phenomenon of guidance plays an important role in the web of resemblances which characterize the ethical for Diamond. Similarly, Chappell thinks that we can achieve

realism in moral philosophy by examining epiphanic encounters. Very much in a Diamondian spirit, Chappell argues that contemporary moral philosophy is caught up in abstract theorizing which has made it difficult for philosophers to appreciate the true nature of ethical experience: Chappell identifies a philosophical fantasy, namely the idea that ethics can be captured in a systematic theory, and shows it to be a fantasy by pointing to a phenomenon, epiphany, which the fantasy fails to capture. Having thus, in a realistic spirit, criticized contemporary systematic theorizing, Chappell takes an additional step, which goes beyond Diamond in a way which is of particular interest in relation to the question how we should characterize the ethical while keeping faith with the realistic spirit: Chappell writes a manifesto stating what ethics is, and why the phenomenology of epiphanic experiences is central to it.

I ultimately want to argue that Chappell's attempt to provide a general account of ethics on the basis of the phenomenology of epiphanic experience fails for two reasons: 1) Her moral realism falls into a similar trap to Lovibond's: Chappell fails to be realistic by helping herself too readily to the concept of a moral reality. 2) Chappell assumes that her phenomenology is authoritative in a way which leads her to overlook various considerations which other writers on epiphany, such as Charles Taylor, have deemed central. However, Chappell's failure to be realistic in her positive account of ethics is very instructive: it again illustrates that the realistic spirit, if it is to fulfil its purpose, must be viewed as a spirit of self-overcoming and it rightly calls attention to the phenomenon of epiphany as of central importance in ethics, paving the way for a discussion of Charles Taylor's moral philosophy and its account of epiphany, which, despite appearances to the contrary, has important commonalities with Diamond's work in ethics.

I begin this chapter with Chappell's definition of epiphany and the way in which she ties the concept to her positive conception of ethics as presented in her 'recognitionalist manifesto'. I go on, in Section 2, to problematize the way in which Chappell attempts to ground her recognitionalism in phenomenology, suggesting that her 'uncompromising moral realism' constitutes a philosophical fantasy, which is analogous to the fantasies of the moral theorists whom she herself criticizes. In Section 3, I suggest that part of the problem with Chappell's account is that her treatment of epiphany is ahistorical, pointing to the work of Charles Taylor as a possible alternative.

1. Chappell's *Epiphanies*

Chappell's *Epiphanies – an ethics of experience*¹⁰³ begins with three examples, all encounters with birds (from Griffiths, Murdoch, and Manley Hopkins).¹⁰⁴ Each encounter involves a person becoming arrested by a bird, being taken in so fully by the experience that he (in Murdoch's case 'she', in Manley Hopkins' case the first-personal narrator) temporarily forgets his other concerns, and feels an overwhelming sense of appreciation for nature. For illustration, I quote the passage from Murdoch in full:

I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind,
oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to

¹⁰³ Chappell (2022).

¹⁰⁴ The passages discussed are Griffiths (1979: 9), as quoted in Taylor (2007: 5), Murdoch (1970: 84), and Manley Hopkins, 'The Windhover', 30 May 1877, which can be found in Gardner (1953).

my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important.¹⁰⁵

Chappell's book is an attempt to make sense of such experiences. What is going on when a kestrel outside Murdoch's window makes her forget her worldly troubles? Why does seeing a lark taking flight in the morning almost make Griffiths drop to his knees? What are we to make of Manley Hopkins' first-personal narrator's 'heart in hiding stirred for a bird'¹⁰⁶? Chappell's work on epiphanies is supposed to help us to answer such questions.

What constitutes 'such' questions and 'such' experiences? Are we dealing with a class here? Is there something which draws the three bird-encounters together, beyond the fact that they are encounters with birds which had some sort of effect on people's lives? Chappell believes that what the three bird encounters have in common is that they are epiphanies, which she defines as follows:

An epiphany is an overwhelming existentially significant manifestation of value in experience, often sudden and surprising, which feeds the psyche, which feels like it 'comes from outside' – it is something given, relative to which I am a passive perceiver – which teaches us something new, which

¹⁰⁵ Murdoch (1970: 84).

¹⁰⁶ Chappell (2022: 2).

'takes us out of ourselves', and to which there is a natural and correct response. (At least one; possibly more.)¹⁰⁷

Epiphanies are encounters with value, 'peak experiences' in which we learn something particularly ethically significant.

For Chappell, this claim is first and foremost a phenomenological claim. What the encounters have in common is that they feel similar – and how they feel plays an important role in determining what they are. This explains the subtitle of Chappell's book: 'an ethics of experience'. Chappell's account of epiphanic encounters is supposed to constitute a foundation for a new way of thinking about ethics, namely as resting on distinctively ethical experiences, construed as encounters with value.

Chappell's central thought is that studying the way epiphanies feel can tell us something about the nature of ethical experience more generally, and hence about the nature of ethics. She argues that conventional moral theorizing has made it difficult for philosophers to appreciate the importance of epiphanies, because systematic moral theory purports to avoid appealing to how things feel for fear of subjectivism. This is a mistake, because shifts in one's foundational ethical convictions do not generally come from 'any deductive or quasi-deductive system of reasoning about values'¹⁰⁸. Chappell argues that even an arch-theorist such as Peter Singer was not convinced to become a vegetarian by disengaged argument, but by his friends' accounts of the rearing and

¹⁰⁷ Chappell (2022: 8).

¹⁰⁸ Chappell (2022: 50).

slaughter of animals.¹⁰⁹ The fundamental claim here is that moral theories grow out of our experience, rather than dictating top down what is right. In this context, Chappell draws attention to the prevalent use in ethics of the 'hopelessly vague' term 'intuition', which, she holds, registers the fact that 'ethical argument typically starts from some pre-existing ethical experience'¹¹⁰. Chappell wants to give experience primacy over argument, because she thinks that that is how ethical thinking is structured.

The structure of Chappell's argument here can be read as an attempt to approach ethics in a realistic spirit: philosophers claim that ethics must take the form of a systematic theory, but do not realize that the theories they present in response to this demand are in fact distorted attempts to express a particular moral phenomenology. If Chappell is right, the systematic moral theories of which she is critical are philosophical fantasies: pseudo-explanations of ethics which cannot be successful, because they ignore the phenomenology on which they in fact depend.

What then is the phenomenology in question? What is it that the systematisers are missing, according to Chappell? Chappell's answer is recognitionalism, the view that 'values are encountered'¹¹¹, which Chappell presents in a nine-point manifesto. The first point gives the central idea, the other eight points further specify the thesis. It is worth quoting the first point in full:

¹⁰⁹ Chappell (2022: 50).

¹¹⁰ Chappell (2022: 53).

¹¹¹ Chappell (2022: 112).

Values are *encountered*. We might almost say we bump into them. They come to us from outside; like tables and trees and tax-invoices, they are 'just there', waiting for us to notice or apprehend them. As with tables, trees, and tax-invoices, we don't *construct* values, or *infer* them from other, more basic or immediate objects of experience. We experience the values themselves, directly.¹¹²

Recognitionalism stated in this way sounds like a metaphysical thesis: The world is made up of trees, tables, tax-invoices, ..., *and values*. But Chappell does not mean for recognitionalism to be a metaphysical theory. Instead, Chappell presents recognitionalism as a phenomenological exploration. Recognitionalism is Chappell's attempt to characterize the epiphanic experiences which are exemplified in the bird-encounters above, and possibly in Singer's conversion to vegetarianism.

The key to understanding the relationship between Chappell's account of epiphanies and her recognitionalism can be found in three of the phenomenological characteristics of epiphany which Chappell mentions in her definition: epiphanies i) feel like they come from outside, ii) take us outside ourselves and iii) demand a response. Chappell's idea is that the only way of taking this phenomenology seriously is to construe epiphanies as encounters with value. In order really to come from outside, take us outside ourselves and demand a response, epiphanies must be genuine encounters *with something*. If we do not opt for recognitionalism, our sense that epiphanies come from outside, etc. will

¹¹² Chappell (2022: 112).

be delusional, a mere appearance. Chappell's name for the something in question is 'value'.

Chappell illustrates her claim that epiphanies are encounters with value with a particular example, *King Xerxes and the plane tree*¹¹³. Xerxes, en route to battle, encounters a majestic plane tree which arrests his attention. He has his army stop to contemplate the tree's great beauty, has the tree decorated with treasure and posts guards to protect it before he eventually moves his army on. On the face of it, this is an encounter with a tree, not with a value, but this is very much part of the point. Chappell wants to argue that Xerxes' encounter with the tree is simultaneously an encounter with value, which shows itself in the phenomenology of the experience. Xerxes 'takes the tree to give him reasons to act'¹¹⁴, which 'are not a function of what Xerxes *already* wants'¹¹⁵. Indeed, stopping to decorate the tree *conflicts* with his prior intention to get to the battle. In encountering the tree, Xerxes finds his valuations reordered by something that comes from outside himself, takes him outside himself and demands a response. Chappell's gloss for this is that the tree is a value.

In the next section, I will provide criticism of Chappell's approach to moral philosophy.

First, I want briefly to summarize the structure of Chappell's project in *Epiphanies*:

¹¹³ Chappell (2022: 116-119).

¹¹⁴ Chappell (2022: 117).

¹¹⁵ Chappell (2022: 116). A considerable part of Chappell's second chapter is devoted to arguing against Williams' internal reasons thesis. See Williams (1981). Chappell needs to reject the internal reasons thesis in order to make room for the thought that one might be given a reason simply by virtue of an encounter one has, without previously having anything in one's basic motivational set which might yield such a reason.

1. Much contemporary systematizing moral philosophy completely ignores moral phenomenology. This is unrealistic, because our systematic theories in fact *depend* on phenomenology.
2. To overcome the unrealism of the systematisers, we must make moral phenomenology foundational to the moral philosophical endeavour.
3. Making phenomenology foundational points to epiphanies as paradigm cases of ethical experience.
4. Epiphanies are experienced as manifestations *of something*.
5. Chappell's gloss of this 'something' is 'value'.
6. Values are not supposed to be a special metaphysical entity, but something perfectly ordinary, which we encounter in the world.

I want to suggest that there is something unrealistic in the way in which Chappell ties epiphanies to value.

2. Recognitionalism and Metaphysics

Chappell's account is rather bold, and, as she herself presents it, counter-cultural: Chappell considers mainstream, systematizing moral philosophy to be unrealistic, because it ignores moral phenomenology. In this section, I want to suggest that Chappell's account of this phenomenology is at risk of itself constituting a fantasy. There are two features of Chappell's recognitionalism which should give a reader of Diamond pause, both connected with Chappell's reliance on the concept of value. The first is her way of construing what values are. Certain remarks Chappell makes about things *being*

values, and about meta-ethical realism being the only way to make proper sense of moral phenomenology, raise the question whether the concept of value, despite the critical work it does for Chappell in exposing the fantasies of those philosophers who ignore moral phenomenology, might constitute a fantasy of its own. Second, there is reason to worry that the concept of value does not in fact describe the phenomenology of epiphanic experience as well as Chappell thinks it does. Various epiphanies, particularly those associated with literary modernism, consciously lack an object. In these epiphanies there is no *thing* which might be thought to *be* a value. Chappell's account of epiphanies as particularly significant manifestations of value seems to obscure these important epiphanies.

I will discuss each worry in turn, in order then, in Section 3, to suggest that the fantasies in Chappell's account of epiphany are avoided in Charles Taylor's account of the epiphanies of modernism, paving the way for an assessment of the philosophy of Charles Taylor as a more promising manifestation of the realistic spirit in Chapters 4 and 5.

a) Things are Values: Avoiding Intuitionism

Chappell writes: 'things do not *contain* the values, nor are they *means-ends related* to the values; they *are* the values.'¹¹⁶ By things, Chappell means ordinary objects, such as trees, tables and tax-invoices. The reason for saying that things *are* values is that is to avoid making implausible metaphysical claims. In particular, Chappell is concerned with

¹¹⁶ Chappell (2022: 117).

avoiding two unrealistic theories: 1) Moorean intuitionism, which holds that values are non-natural entities, perceptible by a special faculty of intuition¹¹⁷, and 2) a reduction of value to something subjective.

Chappell's worries about intuitionism come out in her criticism of talk of '*instances of value, or loci of value*'¹¹⁸. Her concern is that 'such phrases [...] suggest that [...] whatever it is that is encountered, is as it were a receptacle containing an amorphous stuff, the stuff *value*, which like milk or dough could just as well be contained in other receptacles, and which perhaps comes in (measurable?) quantities.'¹¹⁹ Chappell opposes the intuitionist idea that value is a special kind of stuff. But because she is, like the intuitionists, committed to the idea that value is something which we perceive, or, at the very least, encounter¹²⁰, she feels compelled to give some kind of gloss as to where value is located in the world. The idea that the things themselves are the values is supposed to liberate us from the idea that value is a special stuff, while keeping hold of the thought that value is in the world. This, however, leaves us with the question what it means for things to be values. Chappell offers two ways of approaching this question, both of which seem to be problematic, and both of which, interestingly, seem to follow a Lovibondian pattern.

1) Chappell thinks that 'value-experience [...] evidently demands to be taken [...] as realistic.'¹²¹ In a footnote to this sentence, she writes that people are instinctive realists,

¹¹⁷ Moore (1903: Chapter 6).

¹¹⁸ Chappell (2022: 117).

¹¹⁹ Chappell (2022:117).

¹²⁰ For her discussion of the distinction, see Chappell (2022: 128).

¹²¹ Chappell (2022: 130).

among other things, because they think that moral judgments are truth-evaluable ‘in the ordinary sense of ‘true’’, and that ‘by definition, only a realist metaethics can make full sense of [this affirmation].’¹²² She adds that ‘value-experience is such a pervasive feature of our lives that it is almost impossible, in practice at least, *not* to take it as realistic.’¹²³ The claim here seems to be that, by definition, for a judgment to be true is for it to be about some reality. The two notions are being treated as equivalent. This is structurally analogous to Lovibond's attempt to keep faith with realism without incurring implausible metaphysical commitments in *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*. Both Chappell and Lovibond rightly point out that we ordinarily take moral judgments to be true. They both then go on to suggest that the only way to make proper sense of this is moral realism and try to avoid implausible metaphysical commitments by giving an account of the realism in question which does not postulate any special entities. However, as the discussion in Chapter 2 showed, the assumption that for a proposition to be truth-evaluable is for it to be about something, is mistaken. It is perfectly possible for a sentence to be truth-evaluable, without it thereby being the case that there is something to which the proposition stands in a descriptive relation. Truth-evaluability does not imply realism.

2) There is a way of construing Chappell's realism, which does not seem to rely on the illegitimate assumption above, namely to understand her claim that ‘the things *are* the values’ in terms of reasons. One way Chappell suggests of glossing what it might mean to say that the tree, which Xerxes encounters, is a value is that the tree provides Xerxes

¹²² Chappell (2022: 130).

¹²³ Chappell (2022: 130-131).

with various new reasons for acting: for example, he halts his army, *because of the tree*. As indicated at the end of the previous section, Chappell believes that for the tree to constitute a genuine external reason for Xerxes to act, it must be a value. The alternative is that Xerxes is projecting something onto the tree, or acting in response to a delusion. There is again something reminiscent of Lovibond here, this time of *Ethical Formation*, where Lovibond had suggested that for a discourse to be moral is for it to have a bearing on the space of reasons. Spelling out what values are via the reasons-route, as Chappell does in her discussion of Xerxes, is problematic in two ways. Firstly, it is not obvious to what extent the tree provides Xerxes with reasons for action at all. In the discussion of guidance in Chapter 2, Section 3, I suggested that part of Diamond's point in calling attention to the phenomenon of guidance is to show that moral thinking is not always based on *reasons*. If one acts in the light of Simone Weil's writing on chance, the relation between one's action and the experience in virtue of which this action is performed is precisely not explicable in terms of reasons. Chappell might be too quick when she moves from the fact that Xerxes' encounter with the tree calls for a response to the idea that Xerxes is being given reasons. It would have to be investigated very carefully what exactly the reasons in question are and where exactly they come from if the idea of reason-giving is supposed to ground Chappell's account of value. Secondly, one might worry that the thought that for Xerxes to be given reasons by his encounter with the tree, there must be something independent of Xerxes in the encounter which *gives* the reasons, is a philosophical fantasy reaching back to a similar picture as Lovibond's 'space of reasons'. Again, going back to Chapter 2 can help to see how this is so.¹²⁴ When

¹²⁴ A detailed discussion of Lovibond's 'space of reasons' is to be found in Chapter 2, Section 4.

Socrates explains that he must stay in prison because the city of Athens is like a father to him, Socrates seems to be articulating a reason, but not one which was already there to be 'bumped into', like a tree or tax invoice. He makes a radically new connection, but one which seems to him nonetheless to be absolutely binding. It might even be thought to be an external reason, given that the analogy need not have stemmed from any of Socrates' prior motivations. Given that it is possible for Socrates' thinking to constitute radical moral innovation without there being any need to find *something* for Socrates to have encountered, in virtue of which Socrates' innovation is proven not to be delusional, it is unclear why Xerxes' encounter with the tree should be thought to be any different. The fact that the tree which Xerxes encounters plays an important role in determining Xerxes' ensuing actions does not, on its own, explain what it would mean for the tree to be 'a value' in Chappell's sense.

Chappell's view is, then, much closer to Moorean intuitionism than she tries to make it seem. Chappell never explains the concept of value in any detail, but merely postulates as an (apparently) necessary feature, if we are to make proper sense of our phenomenology. She takes her view that values are real to be supported by the claim that the alternative is to embrace subjectivism, which is an undesirable alternative because it renders any claim that epiphanies make real demands on us delusional. But it is far from obvious that recognitionalist realism (which seems dangerously close to Moorean intuitionism) and subjectivism are the only options. Chappell uncritically reaffirms the very dichotomy between realism and anti-realism which the realistic spirit attempts to avoid.

It is surprising that a philosopher such as Chappell, who is heavily influenced by Wittgenstein and cites both Diamond and Charles Taylor as allies in her project of overcoming systematizing moral philosophy, should fall back on an uncritical realism in ethics. I want to suggest that the reason she falls back on uncritical realism stems from her construal of phenomenology. Chappell tries to avoid the unrealism of philosophical theorizing by starting with how things actually feel. It can be tempting to think that insofar as one's philosophy is an attempt to articulate a particular phenomenology, one cannot fail to be realistic: one is, after all, directly engaged with *real* experiences. However, there are two dangers here, which Chappell might be thought not to have taken seriously enough: 1) there is never a guarantee that one's articulations of a particular phenomenology actually best capture the phenomenology in question. Chappell sometimes writes as though she thinks that one has complete first-person authority over the description of one's epiphanic encounters. 2) if one is in the grip of a particular philosophical fantasy, this fantasy can have an impact on one's phenomenology. Maybe Chappell experiences epiphanies as having a realist force, because she is in the grip of a particular philosophical picture of what it means for an experience to be real, not because she actually encounters values in her epiphanies.

b) Modernist Epiphanies

Chappell's definition of epiphany is very permissive and intended to capture a considerably variety of experiences. However, there is reason to think that, by construing epiphanies as encounters with value, Chappell excludes an important class of epiphanies: the epiphanies of modernist art, two of which I will discuss in this section.

One canonical example of an epiphany for which the recognitionalist story seems not to work is Proust's madeleine-episode in *Swann's Way*. Proust's narrator, Marcel, tastes a madeleine (a small French cake) dipped in tea and finds his attention completely captured by the experience. The experience is so potent he obsessively tries to investigate what so arrested him. Eventually, he remembers having had tea and madeleines with his aunt Léonie many years previously, and the episode becomes crucial for the novel's extensive exploration of his past.¹²⁵ This is in many ways a paradigm case of epiphany in Chappell's sense: it is sudden, surprising, existentially significant, 'comes from outside,' calls for a response (in this case further investigation), teaches something new. It is also of considerable ethical significance in Marcel's story in that it constitutes the impetus for his attempt to recover his past. However, it is unclear how much room there is here to speak of value-encounter, because it is quite difficult to point to anything that could be called 'the value' in this epiphany. It would be strange to call the tea-soaked madeleine itself a value: firstly, because there does not seem to be anything particularly valuable about the little biscuit, and secondly, because the biscuit itself only seems to be one aspect of what becomes manifest in the experience. So, instead, one might think of the memories that the biscuit has the power to unlock as the value. But this also does not seem to work because it is only after the epiphanic experience that the memories begin to resurface. What is more, Marcel might have had the epiphany without ever being able to link it to the memories he discovers as he reflects on the experience. The most plausible candidate for a value then seems to be

¹²⁵ Proust (2014: 42-45).

the *taste* of the madeleine, which arrests Marcel's attention. But can the taste's value be conceptually separated from the memories? Even if it did not *in fact* unlock any memories, its value seems to depend on its *power* to do so. Can Marcel's epiphany then be made to fit into Chappell's recognitionalist story? There seem to be two options here: one can hold that the memories are in some sense already present in the taste, allowing them to be the encountered values after all, or one can try to show that there is a way for the taste's memory-producing-power to be directly encountered as a value, even if no memories are in fact produced. The difficulty with the first idea is that Marcel sees his journey not merely as the discovery, or unlocking of something that is already there, but also as involving a creative aspect: 'Seek? More than that: create. [My mind] is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance.'¹²⁶ The memories need to be created just as much as they are retrieved, which makes it difficult to think of them as already present in the taste. The second idea, i.e., thinking of the power as itself an encountered value, raises the difficulty of spelling out what it might mean to experience such a power, given that the epiphany occurs before any memories actually come into play. There also arises a further question here as to whether it makes sense to think of powers as something we encounter 'like trees and tax-invoices'.

An even more challenging example for Chappell is the following poem by Ezra Pound, as Charles Taylor's commentary on the poem makes clear:

¹²⁶ Proust (2014: 43).

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of the faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.¹²⁷

The poem juxtaposes two ideas: 'The apparition of the faces in the crowd' and 'Petals on a wet, black bough.' Its significance comes from the interplay of the two ideas, the tensions and connections between them. This is epiphanic, but it does not *express* or *manifest* anything. Instead, as Charles Taylor puts it, '[i]t's as though the words or images set up between them a force field which can capture a more intense energy.'¹²⁸ Of course, it could be argued that the energy released here is the value that becomes manifest in the epiphany, but this seems not to fit with the phenomenology of the epiphany in question. To say that the epiphany is a manifestation of energy suggests that the energy itself is something encountered. But this is not what Taylor means by an intense energy being *captured* in the artwork. What we encounter in the artwork is the frame: the juxtaposed ideas. It is their interplay which we experience as epiphanic. Neither idea is the encountered value, nor is there some third thing, an energy *resulting* from their interplay, which could be called a value. Instead, the interplay *between* the ideas is itself experienced as significant. The word 'energy' is Taylor's gloss for what goes on in the interplay between ideas. But this interplay is not a manifestation *of something*. The interplay between ideas is something that might be experienced as valuable, but there seems to be no room here to speak of a value being encountered *in that interplay* 'like a tree or tax-invoice'. The language of encounter does not seem to fit the

¹²⁷ Taylor (1989: 474).

¹²⁸ Taylor (1989: 475).

phenomenology of the epiphanies in Proust and Pound. Given that Chappell introduces the value terminology in order to make sense of the phenomenology of epiphany, this seems to be a major concern for her view. If the above analysis of these two modernist epiphanies is right, their phenomenology runs counter to Chappell's recognitionalist account of epiphany in particular, and ethics more generally.

Might Chappell say, in response, that the artwork itself is the value we encounter? It might make sense to call the artwork a value because of the epiphanic insight which it enables, but the epiphanic insight in question is not a recognition that the artwork is a value. It would miss the point of Pound's poem entirely to gloss the epiphanic interplay of its juxtaposed ideas as a manifestation of the value of the juxtaposition. While modernist epiphanies are essentially bound up with the artworks which enable them, they do not have the value of the artworks as their *content*. The epiphany happens *within* the artwork, it is not *about* the artwork.

Where does this discussion leave us? Chappell's recognitionalism was put forward as her best attempt to make sense of the ethical significance of epiphanies. This attempt sees epiphanies as encounters with value, a definition which leads to an uncompromising moral realism. There are two worries one might have about this moral realism: 1) it relies on the idea that only moral realism can make full sense of epiphanic encounters, because only moral realism explains how epiphanies can form the basis of truth-evaluable moral judgments and provide external reasons. 2) Chappell's realism about value reduces epiphanies to value-encounters, thereby missing the significance of the epiphanies of modernist art.

What I want to suggest, by means of these criticisms, is that Chappell's account of ethics is unrealistic in that she takes phenomenology to be the final arbiter of truth in ethics. The attempt to construct a manifesto for ethics by starting with a list of experiences which feel particularly morally significant and finding something in common between these experiences (namely that they all feel like encounters 'with value'), seems bound to fail, because a) the phenomenology can itself be infected by philosophical fantasies, b) the Chappellian project is skewed by the examples with which she begins, obscuring the significance of epiphanies which are not *about* anything. These two concerns are, of course, connected, in that which examples Chappell selects is in part shaped by the sense she has of what is important in moral philosophy.¹²⁹

How concerning is it that Chappell's account overlooks the epiphanies of modernism? How much of a hindrance is the fantasy of recognitionalism, i.e., the thought that ethics can be reduced to the study of a moral reality which manifests itself directly to us in experience? Chappell might argue that the epiphanies of modernist art are marginal cases, and that her account is still accurate for the phenomenology of almost all other epiphanies. In the following section, I want to use Charles Taylor's genealogy of the epiphanies of modernism to suggest that the aspects of epiphanies, which Chappell's account overlooks, constitute a dimension of central importance to the concept.

¹²⁹ Given that Chappell writes, for example, that anyone who fails to embrace moral realism is being 'weaselly', it is no surprise that her examples of epiphanic experience are examples for which a realist interpretation, as developed in Chappell's recognitionalism, fits particularly well. Chappell (2022: 130).

3. Charles Taylor on Epiphanies and Modernism

Chappell's account of ethics suggests that to give a gloss on one's personal epiphanic experiences, to write a manifesto based on one's own moral phenomenology, is a realistic starting point for moral philosophy. But, as we have seen, Chappell's characterization of moral phenomenology is vitiated by the same fantasies as Lovibond's realism, and as a result ignores the epiphanies of modernism. In this section, I want to use Taylor's account of epiphany to show that the problem with Chappell's approach is twofold: Chappell ignores the fact that to give an account of one's phenomenology is to employ representational devices which can breed fantasy, and she ignores the history of the concept of epiphany. Taylor's work shows that these two failures are connected.

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor gives a definition of epiphany which is similar to Chappell's, but somewhat more careful. He writes:

What remains central [in the Post-Romantic Age] is the notion of the work of art as issuing from or realizing an 'epiphany', to use one of Joyce's words in a somewhat wider sense than his. What I want to capture with this term is just this notion of a work of art as the locus of a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance; a manifestation, moreover, which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Taylor (1989: 419).

Taylor's definition of epiphanies differs from Chappell's in two striking ways. i) it ties epiphany to art, ii) it carefully avoids claiming that epiphanies are manifestations of *something*.

i) By tying epiphanies to art, Taylor commits himself to the idea that epiphanies require something which does the revealing. Epiphanies, as conceived by Taylor, are not something which reality just throws at us. They require some sort of medium. This idea allows Taylor a way of characterizing epiphanies which is much more concrete than anything available to Chappell. One of the reasons why Chappell struggles so much to give a clear account of what epiphanies are is that she is constantly thrown back to the epiphanic experiences themselves. Whenever she tries to characterize those experiences, she seems to distort them, by relying on the concept of 'value'. If, by contrast, epiphanic experience is tied to a particular mode of disclosure, e.g., art, a different way of characterizing the experience becomes available: one can give an account of what it is that enables the epiphany by describing the way in which the artwork enables the epiphany.

ii) By keeping open the possibility that epiphanies might be significant manifestations without an object, Taylor allows for a kind of epiphany – he calls it framing epiphany – which he takes to be central to modernist art, as exemplified in the above examples from Proust and Pound.

Both of these features spring from Taylor's account of the history of the modern identity. Taylor sees the significance of epiphanic art in contemporary ethics as a historical

product of the rejection of renaissance Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonists such as Bruno and Paracelsus 'saw themselves as grasping the unmediated spiritual order of things.'¹³¹ Taylor argues that belief in an unmediated spiritual order of things is no longer a possibility for us today. To the extent that we moderns come into contact with spiritual orders, it is through a mediating vocabulary, normally crafted by an artist. The Romantic poets, according to Taylor, tried to find a way of making belief in cosmic orders possible again by writing poetry designed to transfigure nature.¹³² This is where the concept of epiphany in art has its origins. Later, the Modernists gave up on the idea that the task of art is to transfigure nature, after it had been called into question whether nature is inherently good.¹³³ If nature is amoral, chaotic, or even evil, art must find a different outlet for its epiphanies. Modernist framing epiphanies, which lack an object, are the result.

This is an extremely brief summary of Taylor's history of epiphany. A more detailed summary will be provided in Chapter 5. The point of providing a quick sketch of Taylor's genealogy at this stage is to introduce the Taylorian idea that epiphanies are an attempt to retain a sense of connection with the pre-Romantic idea of unmediated spiritual orders. If this is right, then the fact that epiphanies are mediated through some representational device (usually art) is not an accidental feature of some special cases of epiphany, but is instead central to the phenomenon. Epiphanies, on Taylor's

¹³¹ Taylor (1989: 427).

¹³² Taylor has explored the epiphanies of Romanticism in Taylor (1989: Chapter 23), and in considerably more detail in Taylor (2024). A good example of a Romantic epiphany which transfigures nature in order to enable connection with a cosmic order that finds expression in poetry is Hölderlin's poem 'Der Archipelagus'. Taylor (2024: 109-114).

¹³³ Taylor (1989: Chapter 24).

conception, are phenomena which enable us to (re-)connect with spiritual orders through the mediation of a representational device, which is often an artwork.

This insight helps better to characterize the crucial difference between Taylor and Chappell, and clarifies where Chappell's approach falls short. Chappell's account of epiphany rests on representational devices just as much as epiphanic art does. However, Chappell's representational device, the concept of value, is too simple. Chappell's recognitionalist manifesto is presented as all we need in order to understand the phenomenology of epiphany, but offers no account of what it actually means for epiphanies to be encounters with value. Chappell takes the phenomenology of epiphany to prove that epiphanies are encounters with *something*, and then inserts the term 'value' as a convenient label. But the idea that the phenomenology of epiphany can be *explained* by introducing a label for the *something* that renders the epiphany genuine, compelling, reason-giving, etc. is a fantasy. Without more extensive elaboration, calling epiphanies encounters with value explains nothing. In suggesting that we simply 'bump into' values, Chappell's *Epiphanies* makes it seem as though we can go straight back to renaissance Neo-Platonism. In being sensitive to the history of the concept of epiphany, Taylor seems better placed to provide a realistic account of the concept.

This chapter has argued that Chappell's recognitionalism is unrealistic in various respects. Nonetheless, Chappell's thought that the phenomenology of epiphanic experience is of central importance in ethics is very promising. The way in which Chappell introduces the concept of epiphany is analogous to the way in which Diamond introduces the concept of guidance, and the role that epiphanies play in Chappell's

critique of systematizing moral theory seems to be in keeping with the realistic spirit. Chappell's work also seems promising in its ambition to provide a positive characterization of ethics, even if the positive characterization that Chappell ultimately provides with her recognitionalist manifesto is a philosophical fantasy. The fact that Charles Taylor's account of epiphany seems to avoid the trappings of Chappell's approach suggests that his attempt to characterize the ethical might be more promising than Chappell's. I turn to an investigation of Taylor's moral philosophical project in Chapters 4 and 5, before drawing some more general conclusions about the realistic spirit in ethics in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4: Articulating Moral Reality – Taylor and his Critics

At the end of the previous chapter, I provided a brief sketch of Charles Taylor's work on epiphany in an attempt to show how the fantasy of Chappellian recognitionalism might be avoided. I want now to undertake a more extensive investigation of Taylor's philosophical project. I want to suggest that Taylor's moral philosophy exemplifies the realistic spirit and yet manages to say something more concrete than Diamond does about what ethics is. In this chapter, I introduce Taylor's project in ethics on its own terms and provide a reading of Taylor which suggests that his philosophical concerns are, contrary to initial appearances, closely related to Diamond's. In Chapter 5, I discuss in more detail the relation between Taylor's philosophical project and moral realism, suggesting that he overcomes the realist/anti-realist dichotomy in a realistic spirit, and I provide a more detailed account of his conception of epiphanies, supplementing the preliminary discussion from Chapter 3. In Chapter 6, I then undertake a comparative study of the way in which Taylor and Diamond apply the realistic spirit to ethics.

1. Introducing Taylor's Philosophical Project

Taylor's main work on ethics is *Sources of the Self*, which will be my focus. *Sources of the Self* is 'an attempt to articulate and write a history of the modern identity'¹³⁴. By modern identity, Taylor means 'the ensemble of (largely unarticulated) understandings of what it is to be a human agent: the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West.'¹³⁵. Taylor's main concern

¹³⁴ Taylor (1989: ix).

¹³⁵ Taylor (1989: ix).

is to articulate these understandings, by which he means finding a vocabulary through which we can give them a clear expression. It is Taylor's belief that finding the right vocabulary requires tracing the history of our identity (or maybe one should say identities). By writing history, Taylor hopes to articulate 'the modern identity'.¹³⁶

Taylor's project of articulating the modern identity can be situated within the domain of moral philosophy, if the subject is broadly enough construed. *Sources of the Self* begins by lamenting the narrowness of much contemporary moral philosophy, and Taylor introduces the first, programmatic part of the book as an attempt to broaden our conception of the moral. It is one of Taylor's central claims that '[s]elfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.'¹³⁷ These connections are obscured when the domain of morality is artificially narrowed, focussing only on right action and obligation, but not on 'what it is good to be' and 'the nature of the good life'.¹³⁸

It is extremely important that Taylor makes the link between selfhood and the good his starting point. That there is such a link has been admitted by most commentators, and there is much in Taylor's analysis of this connection which has found support even among his critics. However, this starting point has also been severely criticized. The basic thought against which Taylor has to provide an argument is the idea that the questions

¹³⁶ The precise relation between Taylor's articulation project and the history which he writes has been a source of much disagreement among commentators. See for example Olafson (1994) and Taylor's response in Taylor (1994). The matter will be addressed in some detail in Chapter 5.

¹³⁷ Taylor (1989: 3).

¹³⁸ Taylor (1989: 3).

‘Who should I be?’ and ‘What should I do?’ require distinct philosophical treatment.¹³⁹

As Taylor notes, there are indeed powerful motivations in favour of making a radical distinction between these questions. The concerns here are nuanced, and Taylor devotes much energy to differentiating the factors at play. A very deep-seated issue, on which I want to focus, is the role that ontological commitments play in Taylor's account of the identity issue. It is Taylor's conception of moral ontology, which puts him most radically at odds with his critics. Getting clear on Taylor's conception of moral ontology is also crucial for understanding to what extent his ethics exemplifies a realistic spirit, given that one of the criteria for the realistic spirit elaborated in Chapter 1 was ‘moving beyond the conventional philosophical opposition between realism and anti-realism’.

The opposition to contemporary narrow accounts of morality, with their focus on right action, puts Taylor in the same camp as Diamond and Chappell. However, Taylor provides his own diagnosis of the contemporary focus on obligation in ethics, which differs from the accounts given by Diamond and Chappell mainly in that Taylor attempts to show that the overly narrow contemporary moral theories spring from conceptions of the good which are entirely respectable but have become distorted. Taylor's criticism of contemporary moral theories, which is necessary for his project to get off the ground, already begins to articulate the modern identity, by glossing the state of debate in contemporary ethics in terms which allow us to see the theories of contemporary moral philosophers as manifestations of the very identity which Taylor's book is attempting to sketch out.

¹³⁹ Ernst Tugendhat was one of the first to make this point against Taylor in a symposium in 1977, the transcript of which is published in Tugendhat (1992). Tugendhat's worry is discussed in section 2.3.

Taylor offers his critique of contemporary theories as the first statement of his own position. He attempts to show that his analysis of contemporary moral theorizing provides a better account of the moral structure of these theories than they themselves can offer. This critical methodology exemplifies the second feature of the realistic spirit from Chapter 1: Taylor develops his own account of ethics by exposing fantasies in other writers. At the same time, he is more concrete about his own positions in ethics than Diamond is. To begin, I want to give a sketch of Taylor's account of the modern identity, which introduces a number of technical concepts (sections 2 and 3). In subsequent sections I will fill in the details and spell out the motivations behind Taylor's conceptual structure by engaging with Taylor's critics.

2. The Modern Identity: Strong Evaluation

At the heart of Taylor's account of ethics in *Sources of the Self* is his idea that human beings are strong evaluators.¹⁴⁰ This section is an attempt to spell out what exactly this claim amounts to. Taylor develops his account of strong evaluation in response to naturalistic and reductionistic accounts of agency, which assume that it is possible to give an account of human agency merely in terms of desires, without appealing to any ontological commitments. Taylor's account can be seen as an attempt to show that reductionistic naturalism of this kind is a fantasy. Attempted explanations of agency, which do away with strong evaluation, are pseudo-explanations. Taylor's defence of strong evaluation against reductionism exemplifies the fantasy-avoidant structure of the

¹⁴⁰ A recent book-length treatment of strong evaluation is provided in Meijer (2018).

realistic spirit. This will become particularly clear in Section 2.2, which explains why strong evaluation is essential for human agency.

2.1. Defining Strong Evaluation

Taylor's account of the modern identity begins by arguing that human agents are necessarily strong evaluators. The concept of strong evaluation is the starting point for his project in moral philosophy, and was first developed in his influential paper 'What is Human Agency?'. Taylor begins this paper with Harry Frankfurt's distinction between first- and second-order desires. Second-order desires are desires 'whose object is my having a (first-order) desire'.¹⁴¹ Frankfurt had argued that the ability to evaluate our first-order desires is essential to human agency. The ability to self-evaluate sets human beings apart from other animals and makes for a distinctive kind of agency. Taylor fully endorses Frankfurt's account, but argues that a further distinction is necessary in order to make proper sense of human agency: a distinction between strong and weak evaluations, which cuts across Frankfurt's distinction.

Weak evaluations are the simpler case. Taylor's example of a weak evaluation is the evaluation of an agent who needs to choose between going swimming now, but having to delay lunch, or having lunch now and thereby missing out on the opportunity to go swimming. Such an agent has conflicting first-order desires, and might, in arbitrating between these desires, come to be moved more strongly by one than the other. This would be a weak evaluation. Neither option stands out as the right, worthier or nobler

¹⁴¹ Taylor (1985: 15).

choice. Both options exercise some pull, and the agent simply prefers one over the other. A weak evaluation is an evaluation that is based on the agent's preferences. This can also occur at Frankfurt's second-order level. The agent might think that going swimming would make her happier, all things considered, which might lead her to want to have a stronger desire to swim than to eat. This second-order desire would still be based on a weak evaluation, namely on the agent's desire to be someone who enjoys swimming.

Taylor contrasts weak evaluations with another kind of evaluation, strong evaluation. Strong evaluations are evaluations which are not mere expressions of preferences, but evaluate our desires and their objects *as to worth*. Taylor explains what this means as follows:

(1) In weak evaluation, for something to be judged good it is sufficient that it be desired, whereas in strong evaluation there is also a use of 'good' or some other evaluative term for which being desired is not sufficient; indeed some desires or desired consummations can be judged as bad, base, ignoble, trivial, superficial, unworthy, and so on.

It follows from this that (2) when in weak evaluation one desired alternative is set aside, it is only on grounds of its contingent incompatibility with a more desired alternative. I go to lunch later, although hungry now, because then I shall be able to lunch and swim. But I should be happy to have the best of both worlds: if the pool were open now, I could assuage my immediate hunger as well as enjoying a swim at lunch-time.

But with strong evaluation this is not necessarily the case. Some desired consummation may be eschewed not because it is incompatible with another, or if because of incompatibility this will not be contingent. Thus I refrain from committing some cowardly act, although very tempted to do so, but this is not because this act at this moment would make any other desired act impossible, as lurching now would make swimming impossible, but rather because it is base.¹⁴²

The way in which Taylor introduces the distinction in the first paragraph is intuitive. Weak evaluations are based purely on what is desired, whereas strong evaluations make use of a more sophisticated evaluative terminology – they discriminate as to worth. However, Taylor's way of explicating this intuitive distinction with its emphasis on contingency vs. non-contingency can sound overly technical. Indeed, his emphasis on the issue of contingency is in danger of mischaracterizing what the distinction is driving at.

Taylor's basic thought is that in the case of weak evaluation, there is nothing intrinsically right or wrong about fulfilling any given desire. His way of spelling this out is to suggest that in weak evaluations, if we decide to judge one desire to be better than another, this is merely a contingent matter. Swimming and lurching are incompatible, and hence we need to prioritize one over the other, but the prioritization is peculiar to this case. The incompatibility is contingent. In different circumstances we would be perfectly able to

¹⁴² Taylor (1985: 18-19).

fulfil both of these desires. By contrast, in the case of strong evaluation, the evaluation is concerned with features intrinsic to the desires in question. Taylor's example of a strong evaluation is the judgment that it would be better to stand and fight the enemy than to run away. This is because the former act is judged to be courageous, whereas the latter is cowardly. Taylor's idea is that here it is not a contingent matter that to give in to the desire to run away would be base. According to Taylor, this is due to the inherently contrastive evaluative terminology: To call an act courageous is to determine that it is not cowardly, and vice versa.

The problem with Taylor's way of explicating the difference between strong and weak evaluation is that this idea of contingency/non-contingency is not particularly clear, which is largely due to the fact that it is not always obvious to what the evaluations apply. The issue is with the fact that actions and desires can be differently described. Running away from the enemy is not always a cowardly thing to do and standing and fighting is not courageous. Described merely as a desire to run away, it will be a contingent fact that the desire in question is cowardly, and hence base. We can always imagine changed circumstances in which running away would not be cowardly. Hence, someone might argue that it is after all a contingent matter that my desire to run away is not the course to be pursued here. If circumstances were different, running away might be perfectly reasonable, and compatible with being a courageous agent. Why, then, can it not be said that my desire to run away is merely contingently base?

Taylor's answer seems to depend on the fact that the evaluative terminology employed here is inherently contrastive. It seems as though Taylor wants to argue, rightly, that the

desire *to be cowardly* is non-contingently base. There is no scenario in which being a coward is a good thing. Hence, if the desire in question is described as the desire to be cowardly, its baseness will be a non-contingent matter. But there seems to be a problem with this account, because it is far from clear that 'I want to be a coward' is a legitimate redescription of the desire to run away from the enemy. People very rarely *want* to be cowards.

The non-contingency which Taylor wants is introduced by the evaluative terminology, but the evaluative terminology is often only contingently applicable to our desires and actions. Very often, we do things that are base, not because we desire to do them as such, but for other reasons, which under these particular contingent circumstances turn out to be base. Now Taylor might argue that the point was that in these circumstances those actions are necessarily base, that the necessity lies in the applicability of the evaluative terminology in the particular case. But then it will be unclear where the difference lies between strong and weak evaluation. If the circumstances are kept fixed, there seems to be no way of articulating the apparent contingency of weak evaluations. I decide to swim-rather-than-lunch because that is what will make me happiest all things considered *in these circumstances*. The apparent contingency of this evaluation was spelled out above by suggesting that if circumstances were different, I would choose both to lunch and to swim. If circumstances are kept fixed, this move will no longer be available.

Taylor's explication of the contingency issue does not, then, seem to succeed.¹⁴³ However, the basic impulse to reach for the contingency/non-contingency contrast in trying to articulate the difference between the two kinds of evaluation seems intuitive. I want to suggest that this intuition can be substantiated by looking more closely at the role preferences play in weak evaluations. In the case of weak evaluation, the only reason why one option is given preference over another is that it is more strongly desired by the evaluator. This does involve a certain kind of contingency: if the evaluator's preferences had been different, the evaluation would have been different. Weak evaluations are contingent in that it is entirely up to me to decide how I evaluate. In the case of strong evaluations, this is not so. To judge an action or desire to be cowardly is to make a claim about it. To change one's mind would be to contradict oneself. Taylor's talk about contingency might be seen as an attempt to make this distinction clear. The important point seems to be that in the case of weak evaluation an option is only good because I happen to desire it, which is to say that its goodness is contingent upon my desire. Taylor illustrates this by showing that if circumstances are altered, the value of the options shifts in accordance with my desires. By contrast, in the case of strong evaluations, the value of the options is independent of my desires, even if, as was argued above, this does not mean that the value of the options cannot be shifted by changing the circumstances. In Taylor's account, which is necessarily rather broad-brush, it is sometimes unclear what exactly is being shifted for what purpose.

¹⁴³ Some further worries about the attempt to make sense of strong evaluations as non-contingent are discussed in Arto Laitinen's *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources*. Laitinen suggests that it is best to find a different way of articulating Taylor's distinction. See Laitinen (2008: 28).

Taylor's distinction between strong and weak evaluations might be helped by linking it to the work of Bernard Williams on thick concepts, which Taylor commends in *Sources of the Self*.¹⁴⁴ Thick concepts are concepts which have inseparable evaluative and factual components. Whether or not a thick concept applies to a given object is a factual matter, but competence with thick concepts requires an evaluative capacity, and to apply a thick concept to a particular object is to make an evaluative judgment. All of Taylor's examples of strong evaluation make use of thick concepts, which is no accident, given that the point of strong evaluation seems to be precisely to combine the idea of evaluation with the idea of an external constraint: things not just being up to me. Rather than trying to spell this out with a discussion of contingency/non-contingency, it may help to distinguish strong evaluations as those evaluations which make use of thick concepts. Weak evaluations are expressions of preference, whereas strong evaluations make factual claims. This seems to capture the central difference between the two cases.¹⁴⁵

2.2 Why is Strong Evaluation Essential for Human Agency?

The question to be answered now is why Taylor thinks that the capacity for strong evaluation is central to human agency. Why could human agents not be merely weak evaluators, as various philosophers would have us think they are? The answer Taylor

¹⁴⁴ Taylor (1989: 54). Williams (1985: Chapter 8). Given that 'What is Human Agency?' was written before Williams had developed the idea of a thick concept, this terminology was not available to Taylor when he developed the concept of strong evaluations. Particularly given his later sympathies for Williams' account, it seems reasonable to use the idea of thick concepts to supplement Taylor's account of strong evaluation.

¹⁴⁵ It should here be noted that, in Taylor (2003), Taylor writes that thick concepts, as introduced by Williams, cannot do the full explanatory work required to account for strong evaluation, because they do away with the ontological commitments which are essential to strong evaluation. The importance of ontology in Taylor's account of ethics will be discussed in Chapter 5.

gives is that strong evaluation enables a certain kind of depth without which human life would look radically different.

In the previous section it was shown that strong evaluation allows us to appeal to more than mere desire in our reasoning. It enables articulacy about why we desire the things we do desire, not by appealing to desires of a different order (Frankfurtian second-order desires), but by altogether transcending the desire-terminology. This is already quite crucial to Taylor's conception of human agency, but strong evaluation enables us to do even more than to evaluate our preferences and desires. It also allows us to evaluate our own and other people's characters. We can evaluate our evaluations, assess whether we are right to prioritize goods as we do. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor calls what finds articulation in such higher-order evaluations hypergoods.¹⁴⁶ The idea that strong evaluation can evaluate people's characters as well as preferences and desires explains the use we are inclined to make in ethics of the metaphor of depth:

Strong evaluation is not just a condition of articulacy about preferences, but also about the quality of life, the kind of beings we are or want to be. It is in this sense deeper. And this is what lies behind our ordinary use of the metaphor of depth applied to people. Someone is shallow in our view when we feel that he is insensitive, unaware or unconcerned about issues touching the quality of his life which seem to us basic or important. He lives on the surface because he seeks to fulfil desires without being touched by the 'deeper' issues, what these desires

¹⁴⁶ Taylor (1989: 63).

express and sustain in the way of modes of life; or his concern with such issues seems to us to touch on trivial or unimportant questions, for example, he is concerned about the glamour of his life, or how it will appear, rather than the (to us) real issues of the quality of life.¹⁴⁷

In a suggestive footnote, Taylor goes so far as to say the following:

[T]he capacity for strong evaluation [...] is essential to our notion of the human subject; [...] without it an agent would lack a kind of depth we consider essential to humanity, without which we would find human communication impossible (the capacity for which is another essential feature of human agency).¹⁴⁸

Taylor gives two connected characterizations of the depth that comes with strong evaluation: to have depth is 1) to care for a way of life, as opposed to the mere fulfilment of desires; 2) to have a sense of what questions are *really* important.¹⁴⁹ Both care for a way of life and a sense for the *really* important questions are, according to Taylor, not only essential to humanity, but also necessary for human communication. This is quite a broad claim, but it does seem to have at the very least intuitive plausibility. Taylor does not elaborate on his contentions about the importance of depth much further than in the above quotations, but it is easy to spell out in more detail what he might have in mind here.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor (1985: 26).

¹⁴⁸ Taylor (1985: 28).

¹⁴⁹ It is notable that Taylor qualifies the second point with a bracketed 'to us'. It will later become clear that this hangs together with the provisional character of Taylor's realism, his conception of reasoning in transitions, and his related pluralism.

When we engage with other people, we rely on the fact that the things they say and do are expressions of character. We do not, as a rule, think of people as mere bundles of desires. Indeed, we would be quite unable to make sense of them if we did. This is easiest to understand, along with the point Taylor makes about strong evaluation and communication, if we think about how crucial strong evaluation is in our attempts to make sense of ourselves. We are all occasionally driven by mere desire, but in the vast majority of cases, our actions are governed by underlying strongly evaluative judgments. While some desires (desires for food, shelter, community – what one might call animal desires), seem not to require locating in a network of strong evaluations to be intelligible, there is an enormous array of human desires which would be unintelligible without such evaluation. Many objects, actions, or desires are desirable only in virtue of the fact that a particular strongly evaluative terminology applies to them. To do something for the sake of charity, for example, is fundamentally different from doing it merely because one has a desire to do it. Indeed, sometimes, the things we do for the sake of charity are such that we would have no desire to do them were it not for our judgment that charity is a virtue. Another example would be the case of wanting to be courageous in war. An ideal of courage in one form or another seems to play a central role in most human conflicts, as do various other ideals which find articulation in strong evaluations. Many of our desires would be unintelligible if they were not responding to underlying evaluative judgments.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Diamond's 'Eating Meat and Eating People' offers many further examples of practices which are unintelligible if construed merely as responding to desires. In particular, she discusses the reverence with which we treat the bodies of the dead and sexual prohibitions such as the prohibition on mating with animals. These practices are not explicable as mere attempts to fulfil desires. If anything, the desires involved in these practices, such as our aversion to eating the dead, or to mating with

In the light of such examples, it is clear that we require strong evaluations to explain our desires and orientations. But more than that, we all, to some extent, make strongly evaluative judgments about the overall orientations of our lives. We all have ideas about who we would like to be, some more articulate than others. Such ideas help us to make sense of ourselves. They guide us when we have to make programmatic choices about how to live our lives, but also play a role in shaping what we do every day. The small twinge of guilt when we realize we forgot to take out the recycling, or the sense of contentment with which we leave a good conversation with a friend are expressions of underlying judgments we make, often inarticulately, about the value of these things. If we are to understand ourselves, we need to be connected to these judgments, because they play a large role in shaping our thoughts and actions.

What Taylor tries to show is that it is no accident that these judgments play such a large role in our lives (implicitly or explicitly). A life which was not to some extent governed by overarching orientations towards some good or goods would be chaos. There would be no way of shaping our various impulses into a vaguely coherent whole. Without some strongly evaluative judgments to orient us, Taylor argues, we would enter a zone of extreme pathology. Strong evaluations are in this sense inevitable, but we can be more or less aware of the judgments we make, more or less articulate about them. A shallow life is one which avoids contact with the underlying strong evaluations that enable it. By

chimpanzees, require explanation. Taylor's account of strong evaluation can help to explicate how these desires are grounded in moral reality. Diamond (1991c).

contrast, articulacy about our evaluative judgments allows for a more integrated, richer, deeper life.

Given that strong evaluations play a crucial role in shaping our lives, we need to have some sense of other people's strong evaluations, if we are to understand each other. If we had no grasp of somebody else's strong evaluations, we would have a very limited conception as to why they live as they do. This begins to explain the connection Taylor sees between strong evaluation and the possibility of communication. How would we talk to someone, if we had no grasp of the moral territory in which they were located? Conversation requires making real contact with the person in question, and that means understanding the judgments that give their life its orientation. Without some such grasp, it would be impossible to understand why the person speaks and acts as she does.

The connection between strong evaluation and communication becomes even clearer when it is noted that the idea of truth involves strong evaluation. The truthful/untruthful contrast is an evaluative contrast in terms of which we assess what people say. A purely weak evaluator would be unable to make distinctions as to truthfulness or untruthfulness. He would tell the truth or lie as he pleases. Of course, such an agent might, for various pragmatic reasons, in fact be inclined to tell the truth most of the time. However, he would not recognise truthfulness as an ideal, as intrinsically better, or higher than lying, which would, in effect, make such a person completely untrustworthy. In talking to such an agent, one would have to assess, in each given situation, whether it would be reasonable for him to lie. This is in effect the view Mackie

tries to defend in *Ethics – Inventing Right and Wrong*.¹⁵¹ The problem becomes even more fraught in the light of Taylor's critique of Mackie in *Sources of the Self*: The ideal of rationality itself involves strong evaluation. Whether or not an action or desire is reasonable or unreasonable is a distinction about worth. So, in our imagined case we would have to assess not only whether the agent has a desire to be truthful, but also whether he has a desire to be reasonable. And neither will be settleable as a matter of general principle, because the agent, *ex hypothesi*, does not consider either truthfulness or rationality to have any kind of intrinsic value. How does one begin to talk to an agent of whom one cannot assume that he is rational or truthful? It is thinking along these lines which explains why Taylor holds that human communication would be impossible without strong evaluation. Our very language depends on it.¹⁵²

Strong evaluation is essential for various reasons. It is essential to our self-conceptions – not only does strong evaluation give us a way of evaluating our desires, but it is also instrumental in the formation of new desires. Because strong evaluation is essential to

¹⁵¹ Mackie (1977). There are various complications here in that Mackie seems to have in mind agents who are perfectly capable of making all the ordinary strong evaluative judgments, but do not feel bound by any of them. Mackie's agents are hence people who tell calculated lies while for game-theoretic reasons trying to give the impression that they are truth-tellers. But the difficulty Mackie faces seems analogous to the one just raised. How do you even begin to talk to people of whom you have to assume from the outset that the only thing that will keep them from lying to you is game-theory? The problem with a game-theoretic approach to truth-telling is that you need to know the parameters of the game in order to assess a person's trustworthiness. But very often, when we encounter people, the parameters are not yet clear to us, *and we trust them anyway*.

¹⁵² The way in which I have presented the connection between strong evaluation and language suggests that there might be two separable arguments here. One begins with the relation between identity and strong evaluation and argues from there to the need for an understanding of strong evaluations in conversation. The other begins with truth and truthfulness as strongly evaluative concepts and argues for the need for such norms as the basis for communication. This issue will take centre-stage in the next section. It should be noted that Taylor's expressive theory of language, as developed in *The Language Animal* (see Taylor (2016)) allows for the first argument to be expanded in such a way as to fully embrace the second – a solution closely related to that offered to the Habermas/Tugendhat worry discussed in the next section.

our self-conceptions, it is essential to human communication. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, communication requires having some conception of the people with whom we are communicating, and if strong evaluation is essential to their self-conceptions, we must understand these evaluations to know to whom we are talking. On the other hand, our language is governed by strong evaluations, which means that to engage in linguistic communication is to place oneself in a network of strong evaluations. If we are to make sense of human agency, we need the concept of strong evaluation. To fail to acknowledge this is to be caught up in a philosophical fantasy.

2.3 Strong Evaluation and The Habermas/Tugendhat Worry

In Section 1, I sketched Taylor's starting point in *Sources of the Self*, namely the purported connection between the self and the good. As should now be clear, this connection is prefigured in Taylor's discussion of strong evaluation. Taylor takes strong evaluation to be central to our self-conception. It is what gives our self-conception depth, by orienting us towards various goods, which find expression in a contrastive evaluative terminology. We necessarily make qualitative distinctions which go beyond the articulation of mere preferences and in so doing take ourselves to be responding to real qualitative distinctions in the objects of our desires. As the argument of the above section shows, we must take ourselves to be responding to such real distinctions. Someone who failed to make strongly evaluative judgments would fail to be a human agent in the full sense.

Most of the writers who have engaged with Taylor's work agree with his views on strong evaluation in that they acknowledge that he offers a powerful argument against theorists who want to reduce all evaluation to weak evaluation.¹⁵³ However, from early on there has been a strong pushback against Taylor's focus on the identity question, most notably from Jürgen Habermas and Ernst Tugendhat. The central concern which drives Habermas and Tugendhat's projects in moral philosophy is an attempt to find a minimal grounding for ethics in procedural rationality, as epitomized in Habermas' *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* [The Theory of Communicative Action].¹⁵⁴ In the above section, I treated somewhat separately Taylor's idea that language is dependent on strong evaluation and his claims about the role that strong evaluation plays in questions of identity, or self-conception. Given that Taylor does not spell out the connections with language in 'What is Human Agency?' (beyond the suggestive footnote quoted above), it is possible to read his basic ideas as allowing for quite a radical separation between the two issues, although, as my reconstruction of his argument and my discussion in the footnote at the end of the previous section indicated, there is in fact reason to think that there is a strong connection between the two. The central disagreement between Taylor and Habermas/Tugendhat is how close this connection should be thought to be.

In his discussion of strong evaluation, Tugendhat accuses Taylor of wrongly assimilating the questions of identity and of good action.¹⁵⁵ Tugendhat grants Taylor his analysis of

¹⁵³ The fact that most of the responses to Taylor's work have been from writers who are broadly sympathetic, at least to his basic project, will be problematized in Chapter 6.

¹⁵⁴ Habermas (1981).

¹⁵⁵ Tugendhat (1992).

identity as dependent upon strong evaluations, but wants to put moral norms on a fundamentally different footing. The motivation for this is that Taylor's account of strong evaluation, as presented in 'What is Human Agency?' can leave the reader with a crucial worry about objectivity in ethics. Taylor may have succeeded in showing that we must locate ourselves in a moral space which goes beyond the expression of preferences, but he has not introduced any resources for distinguishing a good contrastive evaluative terminology from one which is bad. More importantly, he has so far given no reason to think that the evaluative contrasts made in strong evaluation are in fact backed up by a moral reality. All he has suggested is that we must make such contrastive judgments, and that these judgments in some sense presuppose an external backing (insofar as they are not mere expressions of subjective preferences). Tugendhat grants Taylor all of this, but believes that there is a subset of strong evaluations which can be grounded in procedural rationality and thereby be given a special status: they are properly objective. He accuses Taylor of treating questions about courage, nobility and clairvoyance as on a par with questions about truthfulness, obligation and rationality. Tugendhat argues that the way in which concepts such as rationality, truthfulness and moral obligation function is quite different to other evaluative distinctions. He is an advocate of a narrow system of morality according to which morality is concerned exclusively with human action, not with questions of identity. This approach leaves space for a great degree of freedom in questions of identity, precisely by drawing very clear lines concerning moral obligation.

Taylor's response to Tugendhat's concern is that he thinks that there is no feasible way of working out the apparent structural asymmetry between these and other strong

evaluations. If Tugendhat admits that the judgments underlying a theory of morality based on procedural rationality can be considered strong evaluations, Taylor's account of strong evaluation will cover them. If Tugendhat refuses to admit that the idea of procedural rationality is the expression of strong evaluations, his account will be susceptible to the same kind of critique that Taylor makes of Mackie in *Sources of the Self*. Taylor offers a summative response to Tugendhat-style worries in his critique of Habermas, where he argues that the distinction between morality and the good life, which is crucial to these theories, can be shown to be rooted in the very moral ideals which it denies, leading to a 'pragmatic contradiction'. Taylor attempts to show that Habermasian morality is in fact grounded in a particular conception of the good life – a conception which cannot then be accounted for in Habermasian terms, rendering Habermas' theory 'inescapably cramped'.¹⁵⁶ The idea that it is possible to keep one's account of morality separate from one's conception of the good life is a philosophical fantasy.

It should here be noted that when Tugendhat developed his criticisms of Taylor's account of strong evaluation, *Sources of the Self* had not yet been written, and this makes Tugendhat's response to Taylor very instructive for understanding the later development that Taylor's project took. In 'What is Human Agency?' Taylor already makes a connection between strong evaluation and identity. Indeed, this connection is, as Tugendhat rightly notes, what drives Taylor's discussion. However, this does raise a crucial worry about objectivity. If Taylor is going to get to ethics from the idea of strong

¹⁵⁶ Taylor (1989: 85-88).

evaluation, he needs to find a way of grounding these judgments. Human beings can realize all kinds of identities, because they can employ various different evaluative terminologies to different effect. The mere fact that human agency depends on strong evaluation on its own says nothing about the validity of these evaluations. As far as Tugendhat could see, there was no way for Taylor to make good on his claim that any of the strong evaluations we make have objective validity, without turning to procedural rationality. *Sources of the Self* is an attempt to respond to this challenge by anchoring strong evaluations in an objective moral reality without relying on conceptions of procedural reality. Indeed, Taylor hopes to show that insofar as such conceptions do play a role in ethics, they must themselves be grounded in what he later comes to call moral sources.

3. The Modern Identity: Moral Sources

The move from strong evaluations to a moral reality in which these evaluations can be grounded is undertaken in Part I of *Sources of the Self*. As has been noted, Taylor's account of strong evaluation as a constitutive feature of human agency has found much positive resonance among commentators. The ensuing conceptual structure which underpins Taylor's account of moral ontology is far more controversial. Bernard Williams, after applauding Taylor's account of strong evaluation (which, as has been suggested, fits very neatly with Williams' account of thick concepts), writes the following:

From this strong base in experience, however, Taylor very rapidly moves uphill, metaphysically speaking. First, he says that the character of our experience means that we have a craving for the good, and wish to be "rightly placed in relation to it"; two pages later, we have a sense of "the incomparably higher," and this, we soon learn, we conceive of as "infinitely valuable." By this stage, the pale Galilean, in some generic, Platonic form – or rather the yearning for him – has definitely arrived.¹⁵⁷

Taylor does indeed move uphill metaphysically speaking – however, as I will argue below, the Christian inflection which Williams finds in Taylor is not as easily imputable to Taylor as Williams seems to think. Before addressing the movement ‘metaphysically uphill’, I want to address the ontological question that was bound up with the issue of strong evaluation. As was shown in the previous sections, to strongly evaluate is to take oneself to be responsive to genuine features of reality. Strong evaluations are in an important sense desire-independent: to call an act courageous is to take oneself to be describing a feature of that act, which the act has independently of one's personal attitude towards it. Taylor established this much in ‘What is Human Agency?’ by employing what he calls a ‘transcendental argument’. Transcendental arguments, as conceived by Taylor, start from human experience and establish necessary preconditions for those experiences. We experience ourselves as agents, and Taylor shows that strong evaluations are a necessary feature of our experiencing our lives in

¹⁵⁷ Williams (1990: 309).

this way. However, Taylor is sceptical about how much transcendental arguments can establish. In 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments' he writes:

[Transcendental arguments] prove something quite strong about the subject of experience and his place in the world; and yet since they are grounded in the nature of experience, there remains an ultimate ontological question they cannot foreclose – for Kant, that of the things in themselves; for the thesis of embodied agency, the basic explanatory language of human behaviour.¹⁵⁸.

Hence, Taylor's account of strong evaluation taken on its own leaves open an ontological question. The fact that we must make strongly evaluative judgments does not guarantee that the judgments we make track any real moral facts. Taylor's account of strong evaluation leaves open, for example, the possibility that a projectivist account of ethics might be correct. So long as Taylor's account remains ontologically open in this way, worries such as Tugendhat's objectivity worry can take hold.

In *Sources of the Self* Taylor answers this worry by introducing what he calls the 'best account principle' (BA-principle for short). The BA-principle holds that we should adopt that account of our moral lives which makes the most sense 'across the whole range of both explanatory and life uses.'¹⁵⁹ Taylor devotes much time to exploring what counts as a good explanation in ethics. His central argument is that an account of human action must be able to make sense of the agent's point of view. That is, if an agent needs to

¹⁵⁸ Taylor (1979: 165).

¹⁵⁹ Taylor (1989: 58).

make strongly evaluative judgments in order to be able to exercise her agency, an account of her actions must have a story to tell about these strong evaluations. Given that we are all agents trying to make sense of our lives, the agential perspective must not be eliminated in such an account. We are trying to make sense of human agency as human agents, which means that whatever account we come up with must make sense to a human agent. An account which can be endorsed only so long as we do not try to act on its basis would have failed to make sense of its target. The BA-principle states that we should adopt the account which makes the best sense of our lives from both an explanatory and an agential perspective. Hence, the BA-principle allows Taylor to move from strong evaluations to a corresponding ontology. If our best account of ourselves involves strong evaluations, then it involves a commitment to the ontology which is implied by these evaluations.

As an argument in favour of a moral ontology this may seem somewhat quick, and indeed, the ontological commitments which follow from the BA-principle are somewhat provisional. Taylor writes the following:

I want to show that what I call strong evaluation is inescapable. My appeal is to the languages that we can't help using to deliberate and think out our lives and those of others. We have no good grounds to question the ontology implicit in the terms which allow us our best account of ourselves. But these carry a realist force.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Taylor (1994: 208).

The BA-principle tells us to adopt the best account available to us. There is, however, never a guarantee that any given account is in fact the best. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor argues extensively against various philosophers who have tried to show that the ontology implicit in our strong evaluations should be done away with. He shows that their accounts fail to make sense of various aspects of our moral lives – aspects which become easily explicable once strong evaluations are allowed to be part of the explanatory story. The point, however, is that even if the BA-principle is adopted, any account we give can be superseded by a better account. Hence, the moral ontology which Taylor's argument sketches out is not set in stone. It is open for corrections from anyone who can think of a better account. It is in Taylor's account of the BA-principle that it is most obvious how Taylor's project is a manifestation of the realistic spirit. The BA-principle constitutes a fantasy-avoidant structure of self-overcoming, in the sense developed in Chapter 1 as the second feature of the realistic spirit. Taylor develops an account of moral ontology, which is based on the idea that every attempt to avoid fantasy can breed fantasy of its own: every proposed best account can be superseded by a better account which shows the original ontological commitments to have been mere projections, fantasies.¹⁶¹

With the BA-principle in place, Taylor's metaphysical upward movement can begin. Having established that strong evaluations are essential to human agency, Taylor goes on to ask what is involved in making strong evaluations. To what do such evaluations

¹⁶¹ Incidentally, this account also exemplifies the first feature of the realistic spirit in that it overcomes the conventional opposition between realism and anti-realism. How exactly it does so will be shown in Chapter 5.

commit us? In order to answer this question, Taylor makes heavy use of the concept of articulation. As was noted at the outset, it is Taylor's project in *Sources of the Self* to *articulate* the modern identity. After introducing the concept of strong evaluation as essential to selfhood, he goes on to claim that, if we are to understand the ontology that is implicit in our evaluative judgments, we must articulate what he calls the 'background' which enables these judgments:

[W]hat I want to bring out and examine is the richer background languages in which we set the basis and point of the moral obligations we acknowledge. More broadly, I want to explore the background picture of our spiritual nature and predicament which lies behind some of the moral and spiritual intuitions of our contemporaries.¹⁶²

I spoke at the outset about exploring the 'background picture' laying behind our moral and spiritual intuitions. I could now rephrase this and say that my target is the moral ontology which articulates these intuitions. [...] What is articulated here is the background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones.¹⁶³

Backgrounds render our strong evaluations intelligible. They make sense of the claim to subject-independent rightness which we make in our strong evaluations. Explaining the

¹⁶² Taylor (1989: 3-4).

¹⁶³ Taylor (1989: 8-9).

forms such backgrounds can take, and how exactly they are supposed to be structurally related to strong evaluation is crucial for understanding Taylor's moral realism. It is also the point at which Taylor leads his readers up the metaphysical ladder of which Williams' above quotation warns us.

Before we begin the exploration of background languages, it might be asked why articulation is necessary at all. Having noted that strong evaluation is crucial to human agency, why not claim, simply, that the strong evaluations are directly responsive to moral reality? Such a view would be closely related to Chappell's recognitionalism. Chappell argued that in epiphanic experience (which, in Chappell's view, is extremely pervasive), values are directly encountered. Why not think of strong evaluations as simply tracking values in something like a Chappellian sense? On such a view, no further articulation would be required to explain these evaluations. As in the discussion of Chappell in Chapter 3, the worry here would be that simply claiming that strong evaluations are backed up by a moral ontology does no explanatory work. A moral reality which is simply wheeled in to support contentious judgments would be unrealistic in Diamond's sense. Direct appeal to values as supporting our moral judgments would be to reiterate a familiar philosophical fantasy.

But why does anything at all have to be said about the ontology implied by strong evaluations? Given that we inevitably make strongly evaluative judgments, why not leave it at that? Whence the call for philosophical explanation? Taylor gives two reasons for trying to articulate the background to strong evaluations. Without articulacy about the ontology behind these evaluations i) we cannot justify our strongly evaluative

judgments to those who do not share them, and ii) we are unable to make proper connections between our strongly evaluative judgments. The first reason is an expression of Tugendhat's objectivity worry. 'What is Human Agency?' shows that we need to make strong evaluative judgments in order to be human agents with a sense of self; it says nothing about which strong evaluations are right. The BA-principle suggests that the best account of the modern identity will involve such evaluative terminology as helps us to make sense of ourselves. However, we are committed to an enormous plurality of evaluative judgments, and we do not always agree, either in the judgments we make or in the evaluative terminology we employ. Without a further story to tell about the ontology behind strong evaluations, it will be impossible to give any kind of unified account of the modern identity. But even worse than that, each one of us is torn between different judgments and vocabularies. Hence it is not just that we need to be able to justify our strong evaluations to others, we also need to be able to tell a further story about them to ourselves. It is this point which continues Taylor's transcendental argument and links up the first reason for articulacy with the second. Not only do we need strong evaluations to become proper agents: we also need to be able to relate our strong evaluations to each other. To have an identity requires a certain kind of unity, which requires that the strong evaluations that define our identity hang together. Free-floating strong evaluations would make no sense. It is only in a moral space, i.e., a whole network of interconnected evaluative judgments, that each individual judgment has its proper meaning.

What, exactly, is Taylor's story about strong-evaluations? How does he move us 'metaphysically upwards'? I will now give a brief sketch of Taylor's account and then

refine it in dialogue with his commentators. The first additional term that Taylor introduces is that of a hypergood. Strong evaluations recognise what Taylor calls life-goods: when an act is judged to be courageous, it is recognised as realizing a particular life-good, in this case a virtue. But, particularly when different life-goods come into conflict, a question arises whether some goods are higher than others. Taylor is somewhat ambivalent as to how much of a hierarchy there needs to be between goods, but some kind of ordering is evidently necessary, if we are to have any way of navigating a plurality of potentially conflicting life-goods.¹⁶⁴ Taylor certainly thinks that it is part of our current outlook, or outlooks, that there is such a hierarchy. A good which is recognised as incomparably higher than others is what Taylor calls a hypergood. Justice might be an example of a hypergood.¹⁶⁵

In addition to life-goods and hypergoods, Taylor's articulation attempt introduces two other concepts that are closely related to each other: The concept of a constitutive good, and the central concept of a moral source. Constitutive goods *constitute* life-goods. The idea is that various life-goods, which may or may not be compatible with one another, can, upon analysis, be seen to be different realizations of the same underlying good.¹⁶⁶ For example, various human virtues, such as courage, humility, and justice, might all be seen as realizations of a deeper good, a good which we try to articulate when we attempt to give accounts of human dignity. The basic intuition that is being realized in the concept of a constitutive good is the idea that the different life-goods, including hypergoods, which are articulated in our strong evaluations somehow hang together.

¹⁶⁴ For recent, summative discussion of the hierarchies between goods, see Abbey (2023: 82-84).

¹⁶⁵ Taylor (1989: 63-73).

¹⁶⁶ Taylor (1989: 42-46). For commentary, see e.g. Abbey (2023: 91-96), or Laitinen (2008).

Taylor's suggestion is that the way in which they hang together is that they are realizations of deeper constitutive goods.

Taylor introduces 'moral source' as a 'term of art for constitutive goods insofar as we turn to them in whatever way is appropriate to them – through contemplation, or invocation, or prayer, or whatever – for moral empowerment.'¹⁶⁷ Moral sources are constitutive goods insofar as they empower. This adds a final aspect to this brief sketch of Taylorian moral realism: moral motivation. Taylor argues that to be in contact with constitutive goods is empowering, which leads him to reach for the term 'moral source'.¹⁶⁸ Moral sources are what gives our life-goods their motivational power, which makes sense given that these life-goods are constituted by the moral sources. Tying this back to the articulation project, the idea is that the power of moral sources is greatly enhanced if we are articulate about them. Taylor writes: 'articulation can bring us closer to the good as moral source, can give it power'¹⁶⁹. The idea is that by articulating a moral source, the good becomes a possible object of contemplation for us, which in turn allows us to see more clearly the value of the various life-goods in which the underlying constitutive good is realized, and which our strong evaluations exhort us to pursue.

This completes the schematic structure of moral reality that is articulated in the first part of *Sources of the Self*. It is important to note that while Taylor suggests that the unfolding of this structure takes the form of a transcendental argument¹⁷⁰, the concept

¹⁶⁷ Taylor (1989: 310-311).

¹⁶⁸ Taylor (1989: 43).

¹⁶⁹ Taylor (1989: 92).

¹⁷⁰ Taylor (1989: 32).

of articulation in some ways stands in tension with this idea. A transcendental argument takes human experience as a starting point and unfolds its preconditions. The articulation project which leads from the concept of human agency via strong evaluation all the way to moral sources does follow such a pattern. However, coming into direct contact with the moral sources fundamentally affects those levels of the structure which are closer to the surface. As Taylor repeatedly states, articulacy about moral sources is empowering, and what this means is that contact with a moral source in some ways transforms our conception of the life-goods which it constitutes. Not only that, an articulation project such as Taylor's is bound to be to some extent revisionary. As moral sources are articulated, and greater clarity about our life-goods is achieved, previously irresolvable conflicts between goods may become newly tractable, and hence potentially resolvable. Taylor's transcendental argument in *Sources of the Self* does not leave its starting point unchanged.

To sum up, the Taylorian articulation project is driven by the idea that the various strongly evaluative judgments we make must be related to one another if they are to shape our identities. As we begin to make connections between these judgments, various hierarchies begin to emerge. On the one hand, we find ourselves making judgments about our evaluative judgments, thereby articulating hypergoods, which help us to organise and discriminate as to worth between ordinary life-goods. On the other hand, we discover that some goods constitute others. As we bring these goods into focus, we find that they can be empowering. They function as moral sources. Taylor's project articulates the depths behind our everyday moral judgments by tracing the horizontal relations between these judgments.

Taylor's articulation project exemplifies the realistic spirit in that it attempts to overcome the fantasies of reductionistic philosophers who deny the existence of moral sources, and the fantasies of those whose proposed best accounts involve goods which are, despite their contrary belief, mere projections.¹⁷¹ The account Taylor offers of the modern identity is explicitly concerned to avoid fantasy, while acknowledging that it may contain fantasy of its own: Taylor wants his own best account to be challenged and improved in dialogue with interlocutors who might show him where he himself has fallen into fantasy in his articulation attempts.

Having outlined the structure of Taylor's project and indicated how it can be seen to manifest the fantasy-avoiding structure of the realistic spirit, in the next section I want to clarify Taylor's account by explaining how my horizontal reading can help to assuage the worry that Taylor's commitment to realism constitutes a dogmatic appeal to metaphysics. Various critics have suggested that Taylor's project is skewed by his commitment to theism, resulting in an unrealistic metaphysics. I show that this accusation is misplaced, suggesting that his attempt to achieve a realistic approach to ethics via the articulation of moral sources succeeds.

4. Taylor and His Critics – Getting Clear on Constitutive Goods and Catholicism

¹⁷¹ Part of Taylor's project is to show that these two groups of people are not distinct. The reductionistic denial of moral sources is based on an overemphasis on disengaged reason as a good, at the expense of other goods, which are *implicitly* at work in the reductionist's outlook, despite the fact that reductionists deny their existence.

4.1 Worries about Theism I: Larmore

As Williams' somewhat polemical reference to 'the pale Galilean' in the quotation at the beginning of the previous section indicates, Taylor's unfolding of the ontology that he takes to be implicit in strong evaluations is controversial. Given that Taylor is a practicing Catholic, early commentators were quick to note that what Taylor presents as the basic structure of all moral thinking fits particularly well into a Christian framework, while making difficulties for other outlooks. Taylor says as much when he remarks that non-theistic outlooks are 'contestable in a way that the theistic outlook is not.'¹⁷² He elaborates:

Theism is, of course, contested as to its truth. Opponents may judge it harshly and think that it would be degrading and unfortunate for humans if it were true. But no one doubts that those who embrace it will find a fully adequate moral source in it.¹⁷³

Taylor believes that there is a question as to adequacy which arises for other moral sources, but not for theism. He believes that other moral sources (he is thinking in particular of the goodness of nature and the dignity of disengaged reason) might be unable fully to justify the moral judgments they are supposed to underwrite. This issue, according to Taylor, does not arise for theism. Theism, like any other account of moral sources, may be false, but if it is true, it is adequate.

¹⁷² Taylor (1989: 317).

¹⁷³ Taylor (1989: 317). It should be noted that Taylor puts less emphasis on this claim in later writings and has recently explicitly withdrawn it. Meijer and Taylor (2020: 1000). For discussion, see Abbey (2023: 95).

This claim has led to two kinds of critical response, the first of which I will discuss in this subsection. It comes from philosophers such as Charles Larmore, who are sympathetic to Taylor's overall account of moral ontology, but critical of the privileged role which Taylor seems to want to assign to theism within that account. Larmore writes:

The moral adequacy of theism is no less contestable than that of secular viewpoints, as shown by the perennial controversies concerning the compatibility of divine omnipotence with human freedom or of the divine authorization of morality with the intrinsic worth of virtue.¹⁷⁴

Larmore's point is that a theistic outlook is just as susceptible to tensions which call its moral adequacy into question as are other moral outlooks. Larmore is right to point out that *Sources of the Self* pays insufficient attention to this important issue.¹⁷⁵ It is, however, a real question to what extent these tensions in Christian thought affect the adequacy of theism as a moral source. Larmore's criticism provides an opportunity to clarify what Taylor has in mind when he talks here about adequacy.

By the adequacy of a moral source, Taylor could not possibly mean that belief in such a moral source would settle all moral issues beyond contestation. Instead, the issue Taylor is driving at by calling into question the adequacy of moral sources is the question

¹⁷⁴ Larmore (1991: 162). A related point is made by Calhoun (1991: 252).

¹⁷⁵ It should here be noted that Taylor devotes significant space to these issues in later work. *A Secular Age* attempts in great detail to work out the tensions within Christian thought between the calling to a higher life, and the affirmation of ordinary life. Issues surrounding human freedom and the role of divine command are central to these discussions. Taylor (2007).

whether a moral source is sufficiently strong to motivate the strong evaluations which it is supposed to justify. Recall Taylor's basic articulation problem: our identity is defined by strongly evaluative judgments, which can be challenged. In the face of conflict, we need to be able to tell a story which supports these judgments. If we are to hold to our judgments and do what is right even when they come under extreme pressure, they need powerful support. Taylor's worry is that notions of the dignity of disengaged reason or the goodness of nature might simply lack the requisite force to support our judgments in such extreme situations. What is more, it is unclear whether they are in fact in line with our strong evaluations when circumstances are extreme. It has, for example, always been a difficult matter for the Aristotelian to explain how sacrificing one's life to avoid doing an injustice can be explained as *naturally* good.

Taylor claims that such difficulties affect only non-theistic moral sources. In this extreme form, his claim seems to be undermined by Larmore's argument. Theism also faces difficulties in extreme situations. As Anscombe notes in 'Modern Moral Philosophy', no moral outlook can keep us safe from encountering temptation.¹⁷⁶ Where we are tempted to do wrong, the tensions in our moral outlooks tend to play an important role, because they become exploitable in the service of temptation.¹⁷⁷ Christianity is no more immune to difficult moral situations than any other moral outlook, because, like any other moral outlook, it involves tensions which make apparently obvious strong evaluations contestable when they come under pressure. Hence, Taylor seems wrong

¹⁷⁶ Anscombe (1958: 17, footnote 1).

¹⁷⁷ As Anscombe points out in various places, Christianity somewhat mitigates this problem by making absolute prohibitions central to its ethic. But even absolute prohibitions cannot immunize us against temptation. In a sufficiently dire situation, even a firmly held belief in the rightness of certain absolute prohibition might waver.

to claim that there is no issue about theism adequately supporting our strong evaluations under the stress of conflict.

That being said, Taylor is right to want to register a difference between the two secular moral sources he mentions on the one hand, and God as moral source on the other. As his historical investigation shows, many of our strong evaluations have their historical home in a theistic context. They have, with the decline of Christian faith in recent centuries, come to draw on other moral sources¹⁷⁸, but their origins lie with God as their constitutive good. Where a judgment rests on a moral source that is different from the source in which it originated, a special question of adequacy arises. Can the judgment retain its original force despite the displacement of its underlying source? It is this question which seems to drive Taylor's concerns about the contestability of secular moral sources. And, given that theism predates secular moral sources when it comes to explaining the modern identity, this question will not arise in the same way for the adequacy of theism.¹⁷⁹

Putting things in this way allows for a defence of Taylor's claim that theism is uncontestably adequate against Larmore's worry. However, given how Taylor phrases the claim, it is no surprise that Larmore should have been concerned. Taylor does make it sound as though theism is somehow an intrinsically superior moral source. I have argued that this is merely due to the fact that, according to Taylor's history of the

¹⁷⁸ As is shown in *A Secular Age*, the availability and pull of other moral sources very much contributed to the decline of Christianity, rather than being a mere result. Taylor (2007).

¹⁷⁹ Note that this has nothing to do with theism itself, but with its historical context. If Taylor were investigating the transformation from Ancient Greek society to the Greece of early Christianity, an analogous question would likely arise about the adequacy of theism.

modern identity, the vast majority of our strong evaluations are traceable to a Christian origin.¹⁸⁰ If Taylor's claim is qualified in this way, it seems to avoid Larmore's concern.

But even if this reading of Taylor is correct, Larmore's concern connects to deeper worries about the role which theism plays in Taylor's project: worries which call Taylor's account of moral ontology fundamentally into question. I want first to mention Bernard Williams' main concern about Taylor's account of the modern identity. Williams follows Feuerbach in arguing that 'if religion is false, it ultimately explains nothing, and it itself needs to be explained.'¹⁸¹ He goes on to say that

[o]ne thing to be learned from Nietzsche is that Taylor's own explanation [of the moral hold of liberalism], which depends on the theistic tradition, cannot be as neutral as he hopes, for the fundamental reason that the explanation would not go deep enough unless theism itself were true.¹⁸²

It is important to note that *Sources of the Self* is explicitly not committed to the truth of theism, even though Taylor towards the end of the book states that he has a hunch that the best solution to the difficulties that beset the modern identity might be a return to theism. Taylor wants his history to be neutral as to the truth of theism. This is a problem for Williams, who thinks that if theism is false, it requires a different kind of explanation than if it is true, for the simple reason that if theism is false, God cannot occur as an

¹⁸⁰ Larmore might of course be arguing against Taylor's claim that theism was ever an uncontested moral source, thereby questioning the adequacy of Taylor's historical narrative. If so, the disagreement may call for an emendation in Taylor's account, should Larmore's historical claim prevail.

¹⁸¹ Williams (1990: 308).

¹⁸² Williams (1990: 310).

explanatory entity in the final story. This criticism seems to be very much in conflict with the way in which Taylor thinks about moral ontology. Taylor is attempting to articulate the history of the modern identity very much from within. The BA-principle applies just as much to historical accounts as it does to any account we give of our moral outlook today. Maybe Williams' concerns spring from the fact that Taylor does not properly situate the religious views of Renaissance Europe against their mediaeval background.¹⁸³ This can give the appearance that Taylor's appeals to God in his account of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought require religious belief to make sense. But this would miss the historical situatedness of Taylor's enquiry. Taylor is inviting us to imaginatively engage with the time period in question and to see that within the moral horizon of the Renaissance, appeal to God in one form or another was inevitably part of the best account people were able to give of their identities. If Williams is not satisfied with Taylor's *Sources of the Self* story about God in the Renaissance, there is extensive supplementation to be found in Taylor's treatment of the transition from late-mediaeval theism through the Reformation into the Renaissance in *A Secular Age*. Of course, Williams, invoking again Feuerbach's axiom, might then demand that an account be given of mediaeval theism which does not depend on God. But this would conflict with Taylor's construal of the BA-principle. Williams seems to think of the BA-principle as extolling us to opt for the best account we can give today of all of history. If we are not theists today, that will mean writing theism out of the account. Against this idea, Taylor might argue that it is impossible to make sense of mediaeval moral thought without appeal to God. God is a fundamental part of the mediaeval moral ontology.

¹⁸³ Williams writes that it is odd for Taylor as a Catholic to leave out the mediaeval period, and to jump straight from Augustine to the Renaissance. Williams (1990: 302).

Taylor tries to square this with contemporary atheism by adopting a *pluralistic* realism. It is obvious that there are enormous difficulties here, which it is helpful to raise at this stage, even if they are not yet quite answerable. They will be addressed in the following chapter, along with Taylor's account of subtler languages, epiphany and triangulation, all of which are crucial notions for understanding Taylor's pluralism.

Before turning to these issues, I want to explore a second kind of concern about Taylor's theism, which criticises some of the most fundamental aspects of Taylor's articulation project. Williams, as we have seen, has taken issue both with the metaphysical uphill movement of Taylor's account of articulation, and with his appeal to God as moral source as part of his explanatory history. These worries prefigure a more radical criticism that has been worked out in considerable detail by Arto Laitinen. Following Williams, Laitinen is worried not just about the privileged position theism seems to occupy among moral sources (Larmore's concern), but about the very concept of a moral source. Laitinen thinks that the concept of a moral source is futile at best, incoherent at worst, and vitiates Taylor's entire realist project. He thinks that Taylor's project can be saved by adopting a realism without sources. In the following section, I want to develop Laitinen's criticism in detail. The fact that it is targeted at Taylor's central concept means that it is rather extreme. But it is also very instructive, particularly given that Laitinen thinks that most of Taylor's central insights can survive the excision of moral sources from the project. I ultimately want to argue that Laitinen quite fundamentally misunderstands Taylor, but it is still worth exploring his account in detail, particularly given that many commentators critical of theism have expressed related concerns, as

evidenced in the above discussion of Williams, who sits somewhere between Larmore's sympathetic criticism, and Laitinen's wholesale rejection of moral sources.

4.2 Worries About Theism II: Laitinen

In *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources: On Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics*, Laitinen undertakes an ambitious critique of Taylor's philosophical project the ultimate aim of which is to keep the project intact while excising its central notion: the concept of a moral source.¹⁸⁴ Laitinen formulates several criticisms of the concept of a moral source, oscillating between accusing the notion of explanatory impotence and accusing it of incoherence. As will become clear, there is a sense in which Laitinen is accusing Taylor of introducing a philosophical fantasy. Laitinen's diagnosis is that Taylor is driven by a philosophically confused conception of theism: a theism which makes illegitimate explanatory demands. This makes Laitinen's work particularly interesting to explore in the context of this thesis, as it might be thought to prefigure a possible Diamondian critique of Taylor.

That being said, there is an important qualification to make about Laitinen's work, before it is properly evaluated. Laitinen attempts to situate Taylor's philosophical project within the context of contemporary meta-ethical debates. Given that Taylor consciously avoids the technical vocabulary of contemporary meta-ethics wherever he can, this is a challenging, but potentially fruitful project. It is clear that Taylor keeps some critical distance from these debates, which is arguably due to the fact, noted at the

¹⁸⁴ Laitinen (2008).

beginning of this chapter, that the narrow vocabulary of contemporary moral philosophy is not well-suited to the project in which he is involved. Now that Taylor has developed this project on his own terms, it is interesting to ask how it might be brought to bear on the enormous literature on meta-ethics from which Taylor has always kept a distance.

Laitinen's work offers an interesting starting-point for such an enquiry. However, in order to make this connection, Laitinen constantly attempts to make Taylor's work more precise. He introduces an enormous amount of technical terminology which allows him to make distinctions within the broad, often somewhat vague concepts with which Taylor himself operates. These distinctions allow Laitinen to tie Taylor's concepts into contemporary meta-ethical debates, but often at the expense of sacrificing the spirit in which these concepts were originally developed. Laitinen's attempt to improve upon Taylor's concepts sets him apart from other critics, such as Williams, who writes about Taylor's style that

the air of informality and disorder has some rewards – even its own authority. As a stiffly presented treatise, the book would have had not merely less appeal, but less force. It has demanding things to say, but it is itself in the best sense undemanding. By avoiding the cute obscurities of one kind of philosophical writing, and the coercive argumentativeness of another, it speaks in a voice appropriate to what it is trying to say.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Williams (1990: 304).

Laitinen registers some anxiety about the radical stylistic transformation which his book imposes on Taylor's thought, but deems it necessary for integration into the meta-ethical debates he considers to be important.¹⁸⁶ I hope to show, as I present Laitinen's work, that much of the power of Taylor's thought is lost by forcing it into this register, because recasting Taylor's project in the vocabulary of contemporary meta-ethics is in danger of importing various contemporary meta-ethical fantasies into the Taylorian project.

Laitinen begins his account of Taylor's realism by imputing to Taylor a two-level structure. The metaphors of moral space and moral topography of the self can be understood both at the level of ordinary goods/life-goods and at the level of constitutive goods/moral sources: 'The first level concerns locating the values themselves, and the second level concerns locating sources of value.'¹⁸⁷ Laitinen goes on to say that, according to Taylor, the second level is constitutive of the first: 'the life goods would not be goods without the constitutive reality.'¹⁸⁸ It is here that Laitinen employs his 'master-argument':

The trick is to drive a wedge between the concepts of ontological background pictures and constitutive goods: If one manages to do that, one does not really

¹⁸⁶ Laitinen (2008: Introduction).

¹⁸⁷ Laitinen (2008: 258).

¹⁸⁸ Laitinen (2008: 259).

have to argue much more, one can almost observe the credibility of constitutive goods vanish into thin air.¹⁸⁹

Laitinen believes that life-goods make up the ontological background which is implicit in our strong evaluations. He takes Taylor to be engaged in a significant philosophical project insofar as he is engaged in an attempt to articulate these life-goods. The idea of an underlying constitutive good is something that, Laitinen believes, is gratuitously tagged on to satisfy an illegitimate metaphysical craving. According to Laitinen, all the metaphysics required is already satisfied once life-goods are articulated. Laitinen's wedge, then, is supposed to confine the idea of an ontological background to life-goods and separate off constitutive goods as a different, ultimately fantastical category. I will begin by presenting Laitinen's account of the ontological background, then proceed to outline his argument against constitutive goods and conclude by showing that Laitinen's position fails both as an interpretation of Taylor, and as a theory of moral realism.

Laitinen quotes three remarks of Taylor's concerning moral ontology:

[O]ur moral reactions in this domain [i.e. the domain concerned with the respect for the life, integrity, and well-being, even flourishing, o[f] others] have two facets, as it were. On one side, they are almost like instincts, comparable to our love of sweet things, or our aversion to nauseous substances, or our fear of falling; on the other, they seem to involve claims, implicit or explicit, about the

¹⁸⁹ Laitinen (2008: 259).

nature and status of human beings. From this second side, a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human.¹⁹⁰

Ontological accounts offer themselves as correct articulations of our "gut" reactions of respect[.]¹⁹¹

Ontological accounts have the status of articulations of our moral instincts. They articulate the claims implicit in our reactions.¹⁹²

Elaborating on these claims of Taylor's, Laitinen writes that 'it is relevant that it is possible to articulate intuitions concerning these ontological features, and yet say nothing about "constitutive goods" or "moral sources".'¹⁹³ This is right to a certain extent, and seems particularly plausible, given that Laitinen seems to operate under the (not altogether unreasonable) assumption that Taylor has only admitted three moral sources in *Sources of the Self*: theism, disengaged reason and the goodness of nature.

Laitinen goes on to say that the evaluative properties articulated as part of the background ontology 'have constitutive relations to other properties'¹⁹⁴. As an example, he discusses autonomy, an evaluative property, which might constitute the goodness in a person's capacity to cope in various particular situations. The goodness of a charitable donation is constituted at least in part by the fact that it is freely given. Laitinen sees Taylor's articulation project as rightly uncovering ontological backgrounds, involving conceptions such as the ideal of autonomy, and admits that the life-goods articulated as

¹⁹⁰ Taylor (1989: 5).

¹⁹¹ Taylor (1989: 6).

¹⁹² Taylor (1989: 8).

¹⁹³ Laitinen (2008: 266).

¹⁹⁴ Laitinen (2008: 267).

part of these backgrounds can stand in constitutive relations to other life-goods. However, he thinks that Taylor wants something more than this reality of inter-related life-goods. He believes that Taylor, having articulated these various life-goods, wants to ask a higher-order question as to where these values come from.¹⁹⁵ It is this question which calls for the introduction of constitutive goods or moral sources. The whole newly articulated moral reality is to be supported by some deeper good, which operates on a different level:

The evaluative features and their bearers give us a first-level answer to the question of "where" we get content for our lives from. Engaging with values, living in the moral space and pursuing good goals gives substance and content to our lives. This suggestion is in disagreement with Taylor. Taylor seems to suggest that the source of the meaning of life in general can be captured in one single ontological account of "constitutive reality". One can think, *pace* Taylor, that the content to life comes from a plurality of sources. If my life is meaningful, the reflective question of its general meaning does not necessarily arise. If the question is to be posed, then the answer may as well be found from concrete life-goods as from a connection to a moral source. (see Löw-Beer 1991, 229). This is the rationale for keeping the two levels separate.¹⁹⁶

The impression Laitinen has of Taylor's project is extremely interesting, because it brings into clear focus elements which play an important, but often less explicit role in various

¹⁹⁵ Laitinen (2008: 271, footnote 322).

¹⁹⁶ Laitinen (2008: 268).

commentaries. Laitinen seems to think that Taylor's project is driven by an underlying commitment to the idea that, whatever structure moral reality may have, there must be something underpinning it. Laitinen believes that this idea finds expression in Taylor's concept of a moral source or constitutive good. He also thinks that this search for an underlying source is mistaken, accusing Taylor of failing to take the moral reality which he articulates in *Sources of the Self* on its own terms. Laitinen's Taylor refuses to see the various life-goods which find articulation in our background ontology as capable of on their own giving shape to a morally fulfilling life, because Laitinen's Taylor believes that only a unified metaphysical account with a single big-picture answer to the question of the meaning of life can ultimately be fulfilling. I want to argue that this is a caricature of Taylor, but one which brings into sharp focus the tension which tends to arise between Taylor and critical commentators when Taylor's remarks about moral sources are not properly linked up with the fine-grained structure of his arguments.

Having suggested that Taylor wants a unified metaphysical story underwriting life-goods, Laitinen makes the following argument against the ensuing conception of constitutive goods. According to Laitinen, constitutive goods 'make it the case' that ordinary goods are goods. They 'determine' or 'legislate' that life-goods are goods. 'Once this legislation has taken place, value-bearers can be intrinsically good things.'¹⁹⁷ Against this conception of constitutive goods, Laitinen raises a *Euthyphro* dilemma: 'If we personify the source, we can ask the well-known *Euthyphro* question: is something good because the source wills it, or does the source will it because it is good?'¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁷ Laitinen (2008: 277).

¹⁹⁸ Laitinen (2008: 277).

Laitinen worries about both possible answers to this question. If a thing is good only because the source wills it, its goodness seems to be arbitrary. If the source had been different, injustice, rather than justice, might have been good. On the other hand, if a source wills the thing to be good because it is already good, the source is idle: it is not doing any explanatory work. He adds: 'My claim is not that it is incoherent to believe that all values do in fact depend on the will of God, but simply that such a belief does not add to our understanding of the values, or our understanding of the constitution of the values.'¹⁹⁹

This argument is intended to show that constitutive goods do not do any explanatory work. Either the moral source is accepted as arbitrarily determining goods, or goods are self-explanatory. The obvious way in which to avoid *Euthyphro* dilemmas is to avoid the kind of question which gives rise to them. Indeed, this is what Laitinen recommends as a solution to the problem of constitutive goods. He wants to avoid asking the following question in the first place: 'if agents experience evaluative features as evaluative, or good-making features as good-making, where does their evaluative or good-making nature come from?'²⁰⁰ If this question is never asked, according to Laitinen there will be no call for constitutive goods as an answer, and hence no *Euthyphro* problem. This then leaves Laitinen with the following account:

If there are no constitutive goods, what then constitutes the goodness of value-bearers? Well, presumably the fact that they possess evaluative properties. And

¹⁹⁹ Laitinen (2008: 277).

²⁰⁰ Laitinen (2008: 279).

evaluative properties just are (by definition) value-laden, there is no need for something or someone that might "colour" them with values. And even if there are no constitutive goods, we can try to articulate the ontological background picture, which would make sense of our ethical intuitions (what makes persons worthy of respect, *etc.*). [...] We make intelligible why something is good [...] with the help of ontological features of bearers of value, but it is the possession of evaluative properties which is (vacuously or circularly) the source of value. Some features are irreducibly evaluative. The evaluative realm is *sui generis*, and the interplay of subjects, valuable objects, evaluative features, frameworks of evaluative concepts, and ontological features of the valuable objects can shed light on different aspects of the evaluative realm. We understand these notions because we have access to the evaluative realm, and we understand them circularly, in relation to one another.²⁰¹

As has been noted, Laitinen's argument depends on driving a wedge between the articulation of an ontological background and the postulation of constitutive goods. Constitutive goods, according to Laitinen, are brought in by Taylor in response to an illegitimate metaphysical demand, and are hence quite disconnected from the project of articulating the ontological background.

Of course, Taylor very much does not introduce constitutive goods in this way. It is clear that Taylor considers constitutive goods to be part of the articulation project. Hence,

²⁰¹ Laitinen (2008: 280-281).

Laitinen's argument is best read as an attempt to reconstruct Taylor's story in such a way that it has the greatest philosophical plausibility. Laitinen clearly thinks that insofar as Taylor presents constitutive goods as part of the articulation story, he is leading his readers astray. These goods, according to Laitinen, are not doing any real explanatory work, which suggests that what is really driving Taylor's commitment to these goods is a metaphysical prejudice, not his articulation project, regardless of how Taylor presents things.

What is so striking about this reconstruction is how implausible Laitinen makes Taylor's position seem. Laitinen's Taylor distorts the structure of an otherwise promising philosophical project in response to an explanatory demand which, it turns out, he ultimately still fails to answer. The question this raises is why Taylor would have committed himself to this explanatory demand. Laitinen has surprisingly little to say about this, except to suggest that the problem lies in Taylor's theism. While Laitinen is not opposed to theism as such, he seems to think that there is something wrong with Taylor's conception of God as moral source. For example, he writes:

Taylor holds that it is moral sources that motivate us to live by the demanding moral standards. It is a striking feature of this model of moral motivation, that bearers of intrinsic value have no motivating role. For instance, if I am convinced that God is the source of the significance of the welfare of animals, what

motivates me to promote animal welfare is my relation to God, not the welfare of animals itself.²⁰²

This is a worry that one might have about a kind of Christian apologist who tries to brow-beat people into religious belief by claiming that there can be no morality without God, but it does not at all seem to be a fitting worry to have about Taylor. Laitinen presents the matter as if there were an insurmountable distinction between being motivated by a moral source and being motivated by the recognition of the intrinsic value of an animal. It is as if he were attributing to Taylor the view that you can either love God, *or* love animals. What Laitinen refuses to admit is the possibility of loving animals for their own sake, and *in so doing* loving God. That Laitinen refuses to see this possibility is striking, firstly because it seems to be the standard Christian conception, and secondly because it seems to be this sort of view that Taylor is in fact putting forward in his account of moral sources. In order to get some clarity as to why Laitinen represents Taylor in this way, it will help to take a step back and to reconstruct Taylor's account of moral sources in a way which does not collapse into the implausible conception which Laitinen attributes to him.

It is notable that when Laitinen introduces the idea of an ontological background, he admits that as life-goods become articulated, some life-goods will stand in constitutivity-relations with others. Laitinen's example was autonomy, the value of which is at least partially constitutive of the value of various human actions, such as giving to charity. I

²⁰² Laitinen (2008: 288).

want to propose that to the extent that autonomy does stand in such constitutive relations with other goods, we should think of autonomy as a constitutive good. If this is right, the idea of a constitutive good arises quite naturally as part of the articulation project. This would do away with Laitinen's worry that constitutive goods are being superimposed in response to a metaphysical demand. Of course, this may sound to a proponent of Laitinen's view as though I am merely proposing a terminological shift. The crucial question will be why Taylor makes such a big deal out of constitutive goods if ordinary life-goods can be constitutive in the relevant sense.

There are several things at play here. First, I believe that Laitinen gets the impression that Taylor does not allow life-goods to be constitutive goods from the fact that Taylor occasionally writes as if there were only three moral sources: theism, disengaged reason and the goodness of nature. But this is in fact not what Taylor thinks. He does occasionally speak of these three as moral sources, but more frequently, he calls them domains of moral sources:

The map distributes the moral sources into three large domains: the original theistic grounding for these standards; a second one that centres on a naturalism of disengaged reason, which in our day takes scientific forms; and a third family of views which finds its sources in Romantic expressivism or in one of the modernist successor visions.²⁰³

²⁰³ Taylor (1989: 495).

Clearly, Taylor allows for a great plurality of moral sources, even if these sources are categorizable into three domains.²⁰⁴ This suggests that the idea that constitutive goods can appear at various levels in the hierarchy of articulations is plausible. There seems to be no reason to object to the idea that goods are constitutive relative to other goods, but in turn constituted by yet more fundamental goods. This, then, seems to be a much more plausible proposal than Laitinen's.

But, to bear with Laitinen for a moment longer, how does Taylor get all the way down to theism? Laitinen seems to think that a fully adequate articulation of the goods underpinning our strong evaluations can be achieved long before we reach anything like what Taylor tends to call moral sources (theism, etc.). This is an issue which cannot be settled in advance of the actual articulation project. The question will be whether Laitinen can manage to give satisfactory articulations without going as deep as Taylor suggests we need to go. The following quotation from Laitinen suggests that he might be overly optimistic about his own articulation attempts:

As we have already seen, the articulation of ontological features of bearers of value makes intelligible the differences in our ethical relations to persons, to societies, to works of art and to animals. The way we care for the well-being of animals presupposes that animals are sentient, and that they have some species-typical goals, success in attaining which gives them satisfaction. Persons have

²⁰⁴ That Laitinen misses this is possibly due to the fact that he considers a position in which there is a plurality of sources to be implausible. This is because he takes 'pan-sourcism' to imply that behind every good stands another good, constituting it – an implication which Taylor's conception of moral sources as I am presenting it does not have. Laitinen (2008: 276).

"dignity" because they have value-consciousness and can be responsible for their own lives.²⁰⁵

How we account for the dignity of human beings, which is central to our moral outlook, but notoriously difficult to explicate, is one of Taylor's central questions in *Sources of the Self* and gives shape to much of the discussion in Part I.²⁰⁶ Laitinen's answer to this extremely difficult problem is that '[p]ersons have "dignity" because they have value-consciousness and can be responsible for their own lives.' Not only does this leave Laitinen with the problem of explaining the dignity of those human beings who cannot be responsible for their own lives, it also fails to carry conviction even in the case of people who are value-conscious and responsible for their own lives. The fact that the term 'dignity' appears in quotation marks illustrates the inadequacy of the account. 'Dignity' has to be given the appearance of a technical concept for Laitinen's remarks to be plausible. But Taylor is interested in the notion which in fact shapes our moral lives, and which is applicable to human beings quite generally, not a technical concept which determines the moral status of 'persons'. This suggests that more articulation than Laitinen offers is in fact required if we are to make sense of a concept as complex as 'human dignity'.

Laitinen accepts the horizontal structure of Taylor's articulation project up to a point, but he sees no way of progressing from strong evaluation to moral sources which are comparably deep to Taylor's. Indeed, Laitinen seems to consider it a virtue to avoid such

²⁰⁵ Laitinen (2008: 276-277).

²⁰⁶ See for example Taylor (1989: 5).

depths. This is because Laitinen sees the Taylorian concept of depth as detracting from the value of ordinary life-goods. By suggesting that life-goods are in some way dependent on something deeper, Taylor, according to Laitinen, takes something crucial away from these goods: their self-sufficiency. This point is expressed rather bluntly in Laitinen's work, and in a way which seems quite radically to distort Taylor's approach, but it fits into the same family of views as Williams' humanistic push-back against Taylor. Many critics of Taylor's theism have the sense that Taylor's articulation project, while admirable in principle, is in danger of distracting us from moral reality by hankering after a greater depth which might turn out to be a fantasy. I have suggested that if the Taylorian concept of depth is developed out of a horizontal study of the moral judgments we in fact make, it can avoid this alienation charge. If moral depth is something that finds expression in the relations between our moral judgments, it will not affect the self-sufficiency of the goods which are immediately articulated in individual judgments, even though recognizing the connections between different life-goods will transform our conception of these goods in such a way that we do gain a deeper understanding of them.

5. Summative Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the structure of Taylor's articulation project and defended Taylor against the charge that his project is vitiated by his theism. The way in which the structure of Taylor's project develops was shown to exemplify the second feature of the realistic spirit as developed in Chapter 1: Taylor's moral philosophy is an attempt to avoid fantasy by finding the best account of human agency. It exposes fantasy in

alternative accounts, while in turn inviting criticism. Taylor is aware that his attempt to be realistic is no more immune to fantasy than anybody else's. This being said, attempts to show that Taylor's project is unrealistic by drawing too heavily on theism are mistaken. Taylor's best account does not cave to an unrealistic metaphysical craving derived from theism.

In the next chapter, I assess Taylor's realism in more detail, in order to show that Taylor's articulation project, with its BA-principle, exemplifies not only the second, but also the first feature of the realistic spirit: it moves beyond the conventional distinction between realism and anti-realism. I begin the chapter with the exegetical challenge how we are to make sense of the way in which Taylor conceives of the relation between theory and history in his work. Ruth Abbey and Stephen Mulhall have made productive criticisms of Taylor's account of this relation, which I use further to clarify the BA-principle. In the process, I pick up again a strand from Chapter 3 and discuss how exactly Taylor's work is informed by his conception of art as epiphanic. By the end of Chapter 5, I will have given a comprehensive account of Taylor's ethics, which demonstrates that Taylor can be thought to exemplify the realistic spirit. This will then raise the question how his work is to be understood in relation to Diamond's, which will be the topic of the final chapter.

Chapter 5: Theory, History and Personal Resonance in *Sources of the Self*

In the preface of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor writes the following:

The book [...] begins with a section which tries to make the case very briefly for a picture of the relation between [senses of] the self and moral [visions], which I then draw on in the rest of the work. Those who are utterly bored by modern philosophy might want to skip Part I. Those who are bored by history, if by some mistake they find this work in their hands, should read nothing else.²⁰⁷

The preface to *Sources of the Self* is remarkably short for such a monumental work, and the above remark is one of very few statements Taylor makes about the relation between its two parts. This is unfortunate, because the remark has puzzled many commentators.²⁰⁸ The first sentence stresses that the two parts of the work hang together (the rest of the work draws on Part I), but the second sentence states that, depending on one's interests, it may be advisable to read only Part I and skip the rest of the book, or vice versa. If the two parts hang together, then how can their author recommend that certain readers should completely disregard one of them? In this chapter, I want to discuss two responses to this question, Ruth Abbey's and Stephen Mulhall's. I want to use their responses to clarify Taylor's account of realism and, relatedly, his understanding of the BA-principle.

²⁰⁷ Taylor (1989: x). The quotation in this version comes from Mulhall (1996). The same passage is discussed by Abbey (2000: 52-53).

²⁰⁸ For a particularly critical take on the role of history in Taylor's work, see Olafson (1994). A compelling response is to be found in Taylor (1994).

1. Ruth Abbey on Taylor's Moral Realism

In the first edition of her commentary on Taylor, Abbey points out that, despite his claim that the rest of the work draws on Part I, Taylor's historical analysis makes very little use of the theoretical vocabulary developed in Part I, which suggests that the two parts can indeed be treated separately.²⁰⁹ However, the two parts investigate the same subject, the self, and Taylor makes it seem as though the philosophical insights in Part I are the *basis* for the historical enquiry in Parts II-V. How exactly, then, do the two parts hang together? Abbey raises but does not answer this question in the first edition of *Charles Taylor*, which is almost inevitable in a text which aims to give a comprehensive introduction to Taylor. The question goes to the heart of Taylor's project and, for this reason, is extremely difficult to answer without making several interpretative decisions which it is hardly possible to articulate and defend in the context of an introductory book.

In the heavily revised second edition of *Charles Taylor*, Abbey nonetheless finds a plausible way of connecting the two parts. She ventures the following hypothesis:

[The] distinction between things that change and those that stay the same in Taylor's depiction of identity and moral life corresponds loosely to the structure of *Sources*, where Part I identifies what Taylor takes to be the permanent structures of moral life, while Parts II to V chart the changing notions of the self

²⁰⁹ Abbey (2000: 52-53).

from Plato to postmodernism. So notwithstanding his sensitivity to historical changes in ideas of the self that have a powerful influence on self-interpretations and on the sort of goods valued by individuals and societies, Taylor does not think that morality is history or culture ‘all the way down’.²¹⁰

This thought, that Part I is concerned with ‘the permanent structures of moral life’, whereas Parts II-V ‘chart the changing relations of the self from Plato to postmodernism’, is the basis for Abbey's ensuing discussion of Taylor's philosophical project in *Sources*.

After addressing the division of *Sources* into two parts, Abbey's account of Taylor's moral philosophical project offers some general remarks about morality's domain, goes on to introduce Taylor's notion of ‘frameworks’ and ‘hypergoods’, and provides a detailed account of strong evaluation in the course of which Abbey introduces the concept of realism, writing that ‘[a] realist claim enters strong evaluation [...] because Taylor takes the “fact of strong evaluation” (1985b: 220) to be a human universal’²¹¹. The link Abbey makes between anthropology and realism is important to note here. Taylor's ethics is based, in part, upon general claims about the nature of human beings, and these anthropological claims carry a realist force.

Abbey goes on to describe the phenomenology of strong evaluation, which, if Taylor is right, involves the feeling that the goods referenced in our strongly evaluative

²¹⁰ Abbey (2023: 71).

²¹¹ Abbey (2023: 84).

judgments have independent authority.²¹² This phenomenology grounds Abbey's second claim about realism: 'Taylor moves from his phenomenological depiction of how people experience strongly valued goods towards an ontological claim that this response is warranted. This step re-introduces realism to Taylor's moral theory'²¹³. Abbey's summary of this phenomenology-based realism runs as follows:

[Taylor] resists "the belief that there is nothing between an extra-human ontic foundation for the good on the one hand [...], and the pure subjectivism of arbitrarily conferred significance [...] on the other" to sketch "a third possibility . . . of a good which is inseparable from our best self-interpretation" (1989: 342). His "third alternative between Plato and projectivism" (1994: 210, cf. 211) tilts towards the realist belief in the independent existence of goods while allowing that these perceptions and interpretations could be wrong. At one point he even suggests that this question cannot be definitively settled. The "recognition that there can be a constitutive good, lodged not in the universe an sich but arising in our experience of it [does not] entail that there really is such a good . . . the issue can't be settled a priori" (1989: 342, emphasis original).²¹⁴

These remarks indicate how Abbey sees Taylor's realism about goods as connecting with his BA-principle. The BA-principle states that we must believe the account of ourselves by which we are best able to make sense of our lives. Our best account of ourselves is the set of commitments by which we can make the most sense of ourselves. Realism

²¹² Abbey (2023: 84). Taylor (1989: 4, 20).

²¹³ Abbey (2023: 85).

²¹⁴ Abbey (2023: 85-86).

enters the picture because some of these commitments will be ontological commitments to goods, which is to say that to live by these commitments is to believe that the goods in question exist. Abbey calls this realism 'presumptive realism', because any ontological claims that are made under the heading of the BA-principle are provisional: they hold only if the account to which they belong is the best available.

This 'presumptive' feature of the 'third alternative' leads Abbey to express the following worry:

[G]iven that strongly valued goods vary across cultures and over time, if cultural and/or historical change means that a good is no longer strongly valued by anyone, does it no longer exist? [...] [We are] left wondering about what happens when the human relationship to that erstwhile strongly valued good changes.²¹⁵

Abbey makes a contrast between things that change and things that don't, and explains the difference by suggesting that the things that are unchanging are unchanging because of the way the world is. These things are determined by reality, not by culture. This is the first kind of realist claim, which Abbey makes in the context of Taylor's discussion of strong evaluation. But once this distinction is made, a serious problem arises for Taylor's realism about goods. Besides the schematic account of the self given in Part I, all of Taylor's claims about ethics fall into the culturally contingent category. A question then arises in what sense the goods supposedly realized within various cultures are in fact

²¹⁵ Abbey (2023: 90).

real. If they disappear when the culture changes, then how could they have been, Abbey asks. The second edition of Abbey's book hence also arrives at a seemingly unanswerable question concerning the relation between philosophical theory and history in Taylor's work.

This difficulty suggests that further clarification is required concerning Taylor's 'third alternative', his 'presumptive' realism. Presumptive realism differs from a realism that posits 'an extra-human ontic foundation for the good' by relying on the BA-principle. This is important to note because without the BA-principle, 'presumptive' would seem merely to mean falsifiable, and there is no reason to think that 'an extra-human ontic' realism could not be falsifiable.²¹⁶ The BA-principle introduces an important, further dimension to presumptive realism by suggesting that the existence of a good is bound up with our sense-making. The difficulty with this claim is that it can make it seem as though goods are merely projected onto the world, not actually real, leading to the following dilemma: A moral realism which holds that goods are independent of our attempts to make sense of ourselves (an extra-human ontic realism) is implausible. Hence Taylor introduces the BA-principle. But the BA-principle can seem to reduce goods to the role which they play in our sense-making, suggesting that they are merely projectively real, which would be to give up realism. If Abbey is right, then Taylor's presumptive realism escapes this dilemma by presenting a third alternative. But

²¹⁶ The fact that the good, conceived as having an extra-human ontic foundation, would be independent of our perception opens up the possibility of a mismatch between what we think is real and what is actually real, meaning that, whatever independent goods we posit might turn out not in fact to exist. In her initial discussion of Taylor's realism in Abbey (2000), Abbey uses the term 'falsifiable' instead of presumptive. She shifts to the term 'presumptive' to highlight the way in which Taylor's *moral* realism is tied up with best account reasoning.

whether this third alternative is successful seems to depend on its ability to answer Abbey's question. This is particularly concerning because Taylor's realism will truly exemplify the realistic spirit only if it succeeds in its attempt to constitute a third alternative to realism and anti-realism (or, to use Abbey's Taylorian terminology, Platonist realism and projectivism). Overcoming the realist/anti-realist dichotomy was introduced as the first criterial feature of the realistic spirit in Chapter 1, and it yet remains to be shown that Taylor's presumptive realism succeeds in its ambition to transcend the dichotomy.

On the presumptive view, what happens to goods when they are no longer strongly valued? I want to suggest that this question is a relic of the dichotomizing approach which takes Platonist realism and projectivism to be the only two possibilities. Abbey rightly notes that Taylor's way of tying realism to the BA-principle is an attempt to move past such dichotomizing. But there is reason to worry that asking what happens to goods once they cease to be linked with strong evaluations reaffirms the dichotomy which Abbey had previously criticized. To ask what happens to goods when they are no longer strongly valued by anyone is to separate the goods conceptually from the best accounts in which they played a role. I want to suggest that this is a move which Taylor's presumptive realism disallows. However, Abbey is right to note that merely stating this, as Laitinen does, when he writes that '[e]valuative properties are relational, and neither the objective nor the subjective pole has priority' (2008: 162, cf. 180), is not a satisfying way of dealing with the question.²¹⁷ More needs to be said.

²¹⁷ Abbey (2023: 90).

Taylor's presumptive realism rests on two interrelated claims:

1. A good is real only insofar as it plays a specific role in our best reflective account.
2. The mere fact that a good plays such a role does not *entail* that it is real.

Projectivism overstates the first claim by suggesting that for a good to be real just is for it to play a role in our best account. Together, the two claims characterize presumptive realism. The interesting question is how exactly the second claim is supposed to work. How does it keep open the possibility that a good might play a genuine role in our best account of ourselves, but without being real? The answer is to see the second claim in its proper relation to the first: a good is shown not to have been real when the account of which it was a part is superseded by a better account. One account supersedes another as best account if it in fact makes better sense of our lives; and whether or not an account makes good sense of our lives is something that shows itself as we try to live by the account. It shows itself, so to speak, in *real* life.

I take what I have just said to be in line with Abbey's account of presumptive realism. What, then, motivates her further question about goods disappearing? To lead up to her question, Abbey writes the following:

Taylor's account [...] leaves us wondering, at the point where the phenomenological and ontological meet, what happens when someone changes their strongly valued goods, as he concedes they can. If I no longer feel that a

good commands my awe and respect, was I wrong about it doing so and existing beyond me in the first place? If so, how would we know that other experiences of goods as intrinsically worthy of affirmation are not also misguided? From a realist standpoint, the good must continue to exist despite the fact that I no longer affirm it.²¹⁸

This quotation seems to reintroduce the dichotomy between realism and projectivism, which presumptive realism was supposed to overcome. As a good drops out of my best account, there seem to be only two options: either the good never existed and I was wrong to affirm it, or it continues to exist even though I no longer believe in it. But, if the former is the case, then what reason do I have to continue to believe that any of the other goods on which my best account relies actually exist? Might they not all also turn out to be unreal? And, if the latter is the case, then how were goods tied to the BA-principle in the first place? Perhaps we might think that the good continues to exist so long as my culture continues to exist. But what happens when the whole culture changes? At some point, it seems goods *must* disappear, if there is anything to the BA-principle. But then, does this not show that the goods were never real in the first place?

The work of John McDowell can help to craft a response to this worry. 'In 'Values and Secondary Qualities', McDowell draws an analogy between values and secondary qualities which is intended to show how values can be genuinely real while also being subject-dependent.²¹⁹ McDowell's analogy is one way in which one might try to spell out

²¹⁸ Abbey (2023: 90).

²¹⁹ McDowell (1985).

Laitinen's idea that 'neither the objective, nor the subjective pole has priority.' The central thought in McDowell is that there are two different ways of construing the subjectivity/objectivity contrast which tend to be conflated. He illustrates these when discussing the primary/secondary quality distinction. The first contrast runs as follows:

Secondary qualities are qualities not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states, and thus subjective themselves in a sense that that characterization defines. In the natural contrast, a primary quality would be objective in the sense that what it is for something to have it can be adequately understood otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states.²²⁰

McDowell believes that secondary qualities are subjective in this first sense: they are conceptually bound up with subjective states in a way in which primary qualities are not.

However, McDowell thinks that this contrast is:

[...] easily confused with a different contrast, in which to call a putative object of awareness 'objective' is to say that it is there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it.²²¹

²²⁰ McDowell (1985: 113).

²²¹ McDowell (1985: 113-114).

If secondary qualities are construed in terms of this second contrast, the result is a projectivist account, where a secondary quality is 'a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it.' It is the point of McDowell's argument to show that philosophers such as John Mackie are wrong to construe secondary qualities in this way. They miss the fact that one can say that secondary qualities are subjective in a way in which primary qualities are not, without embracing the Lockean contrast between experiences which are objective in that they somehow involve objects which are real independently of experience, and experiences which are subjective in that they are of something that does not really exist and is hence merely projected onto reality.²²² The Lockean contrast leads to problems when trying to explain how objectivity can be made manifest in experience. It winds up having to postulate that experiences of primary qualities are intrinsically different from experiences of secondary qualities. But given that they are both experiences, and hence subjective, it becomes 'hard to see how a difference in respect of objectivity could show up in their representational significance'²²³. Hence, McDowell's alternative construal seems better able to explain the contrast. If the difference between primary and secondary quality experience is that the former is experience of objects which can be understood independently of subjective states, whereas the latter is experience of objects which can only be understood in terms of subjective states, the difference between primary and secondary qualities is not that one is somehow more real than the other. They are different features of one and the same reality.

²²² Note that it is Berkeley's criticism of this Lockean way of making the distinction which Diamond lauds as exemplifying the realistic spirit.

²²³ McDowell (1985: 115). This is effectively an updated version of Berkeley's critique of Locke.

McDowell then applies this idea to ethics, writing:

Values are not brutally there – not there independently of our sensibility – any more than colours are: though, as with colours, this does not stop us supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them.

Values, like colours, are ineliminably phenomenal. However, as with colours, this does not entail that they are somehow projected onto reality. The table does not stop being brown, just because nobody is looking at it. An injustice does not cease to be unjust, just because nobody judges it to be so. Values are subjective insofar as they are only intelligible within the context of a best account (to import Taylor's terminology into McDowell's account). However, there is no reason to think that this makes them any less real.

What, then, of Abbey's question? What happens when a best account changes? If McDowell's analogy is right, then a change in best account might be thought to be analogous to a change in our colour perception. If we evolved to be able to discriminate between previously imperceptible shades of blue but lost the ability to discriminate between different shades of red, we would presumably coin new words for the newly perceptible shades, and cease to use words such as 'crimson', 'scarlet', 'burgundy' and 'maroon'. It would be misleading to describe such a scenario as one in which crimson disappeared. But it would be equally implausible to hold that crimson continues to exist unseen. As crimson ceases to play a role in our perception, it drops out of our narrative.

Something similar seems to be the case with Taylor's presumptive realism. As cultures evolve, certain goods that were once central cease to feature in people's best accounts. The question of their existence fades into irrelevance as they cease to play even a potential role in moral phenomenology.

I believe that the McDowellian account can make Taylor's presumptive realism more palatable, particularly with respect to Abbey's question. McDowell's account is one way of elaborating on Laitinen's cryptic remark that neither the subjective, nor the objective pole has priority in Taylor's presumptive realism. However, McDowell's account cannot be the full story, as Taylor has repeatedly expressed reservations about it.²²⁴ Taylor is sympathetic to the McDowellian account of evaluative properties, but worries that McDowell's realism is insufficiently robust. The problem with McDowell's analogy is that, in placing values with secondary qualities, he opposes them to reality as it is in itself. Taylor has the suspicion that a more robust ontology than McDowell's is required to make sense of value: particularly with a moral source such as God, it is not obvious that the McDowellian account does the matter justice. The difficulty is that the more robust the ontology, the more removed the account seems to become from the BA-principle. As Taylor himself suggests, how robust our ontologies need to be will depend on what turns out to be the best account. Hence, for Taylor, the ontological question remains open in a strong sense: moral sources *might* be real in a way which transcends the analogy with colour.

²²⁴ See Taylor (2002) and Dreyfus and Taylor (2015).

Given that Taylor believes that we need a stronger ontological story than McDowell's, there is room for Abbey's question to resurface. However, the fact that it remains an open question in what *exact* sense moral sources are real suggests that to what extent Abbey's question can be brought to bear on Taylor's presumptive realism is itself an open question. Is Taylor's moral realism such that we can expect to be given an account of what happens to goods when *nobody* believes in them? Or is the suggestion that goods can be separated *entirely* from best accounts an affirmation of the Platonist realism which Taylor is trying to overcome? I want to suggest that the fact that Taylor does not speak of goods disappearing in his genealogical accounts of the shifts in available sources indicates that his position is close enough to McDowell's to suggest that the analogy with colours provides a legitimate answer to Abbey's worry, despite the fact that Taylor has reservations about McDowell's account.

I want to support this claim with a brief sketch of the historical narrative in Parts II-V of *Sources of the Self*, which shows how Western culture moved from monism to pluralism about moral sources between 1500 and 2000. Where, previously, the only available moral source was theism, today there are three domains of moral sources: i) theism, ii) the naturalism of disengaged reason, iii) epiphanic art. The central question faced by us moderns is which of these sources are real, and which are mere projections. Taylor's narrative suggests that this question has been given various answers to date:

Originally, Western ethics was solidly grounded in theism. The enlightenment saw an enormous development in reason. Taylor traces the origins of the Enlightenment's conception of individual disengaged reason to the Reformation, the Cartesian Self, and

Augustine). Disengaged reason brought with it a naturalism which has its origins at least in part in the Reformation's affirmation of ordinary life. This development makes the naturalism of disengaged reason a new, extremely fruitful domain of moral sources, leading first to Deism, and later to Humanism. While not initially in conflict with theism (Taylor takes great pains to show that the naturalism of disengaged reason originated in a theistic conception, and was not initially a driver of atheism), the naturalism of disengaged reason eventually came, for many, to replace theism as moral source. However, as Taylor goes on to show, disengaged reason, while a powerful source, was not able on its own to support the manifold moral commitments of the enlightenment. This becomes clear in the criticisms of Kantianism in the 1790s, which argue that Kant's rationalistic moral philosophy conflicts with human nature. The tension between Kantian disengaged reason and an account of human nature as *feeling* nature (as exemplified in the writings of the sentimentalists), is the point of origin for the Romantic movement. The Romantic generation is united by a sense that something important has been lost, namely morality's contact with reality (a loss which is starkly felt in the Kantian neglect of human nature). The central idea that the Romantics contribute to the history of moral philosophy is the idea that this contact might be recoverable through art. Thus the project of epiphanic art is born, the idea being that art has the power to render its object translucent, to allow us to connect to the true nature of the object, by elevating both us and the object with which we have come into contact to a higher sphere in which the object, transfigured by the artwork, fits once again into a higher order. This Romantic conception of art as epiphanic then transforms over the two ensuing centuries, while remaining in constant dialogue with the other non-theistic domain of moral sources: the naturalism of disengaged reason. Conceptions of nature and reality

are increasingly dictated by disengaged reason, and art transforms to accommodate the new visions of reality by amending its conception of epiphany. Modernist art eventually drops the ambition to connect us to a deeper reality, focusing instead on framing the existing, neutral reality of natural science in a way which enables an experience of meaning as we engage with this frame. After this whole development we now have three domains of moral sources in play, as opposed to one.

This brief summary of Taylor's narrative in *Sources* makes it clear how different moral outlooks give rise to one another in a way where previous sources are given up in favour of new ones. If a secularist outlook were to win out in the conflicts of modernity, this process would culminate with the acknowledgement that certain previous moral sources, such as God, were mere projections, not genuine goods. To the extent that there was something genuinely empowering in the theism that has been superseded, the new account would have to find a secular reformulation of the same good, for it would be strange for an account to claim that God really existed when people believed in him, but later disappeared. Indeed, such a claim would seem to border on incoherence. Part of the point of Taylor's BA-principle is to guide us away from the temptation to think of goods as appearing and disappearing. This terminology seems to be a remnant of the dichotomy between an extra-human, ontic realism and projectivism, which Taylor's project is an attempt to overcome. In developing a 'third alternative', presumptive realism, Taylor seems to succeed in moving beyond this dichotomy, thereby exemplifying the first feature of the realistic spirit.

2. Situating Taylor's Realism in its Historical Context

The previous section made it clear why Abbey's question might be thought to reaffirm the dichotomy between Platonist realism and projectivism, while acknowledging that the question can be very helpful in clarifying how exactly Taylor's presumptive realism is supposed to work. So far, the discussion of this 'presumptive' realism has centred around Taylor's genealogical narrative in Parts II-V. However, I noted earlier that Abbey calls attention to the fact that Taylor's anthropological claims in Part I also constitute realist claims. They constitute these claims without involving a historical dimension, given that they chart 'the permanent structures of moral thought'. How, then, do these anthropological claims fit into the 'presumptive' character of Taylor's realism? Are they presumptive at all, or do they fall into a fundamentally different category than Taylor's realism about goods?

Taylor's realism about goods is presumptive by virtue of being based on the BA-principle. Is the BA-principle also at work in Taylor's anthropological generalizations? I want to suggest that it is, which comes out in an important quotation from the final chapter of *Sources*:

The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through [...] personal resonance. This is true not only of epiphanic art but of other efforts, in philosophy, in criticism, which attempt the same search. This work, though it obviously fails of any epiphanic quality, falls into the same category. I have throughout sought language to clarify the

issues, and I have found this in images of profound personal resonance like 'epiphany', 'moral sources', 'disengagement', 'empowering', and others. These are the images which enable me to see more clearly than I did before.²²⁵

What this quotation tells us is that the term 'moral source', one of the key concepts in Taylor's Part I account of the 'permanent structures of moral life', is itself an 'image of profound personal resonance'. This suggests that the structures in Part I are themselves intended to be part of Taylor's best account. It is not the case that Part I offers unshakeable truths about the structure of ethics into which various goods can then be integrated via historically informed best-account-reasoning. Instead, the two parts of *Sources* together constitute Taylor's best account of modernity. Abbey is right to note that this best account posits both permanent structures (collected in Part I) and fluctuating accounts of historically situated goods (Parts II-V). But *both* parts are provisional. Both parts are authoritative only insofar as they can resonate with us.

In this section and the next, I will examine how Taylor's ideas about the importance of personal resonance in contemporary moral thought arise out of his historical investigation. I will then draw on Mulhall's reading of Taylor to show that this connection between philosophical theory and history is sometimes in danger of becoming obscured by Taylor himself, which gives rise to questions such as Abbey's. In the final section I give a brief account of how *Sources* might be emended in order better to reflect Taylor's

²²⁵ Taylor (1989: 512).

views about the dependence of ethics on a personal dimension, while emphasizing the inherently dialogical nature of Taylor's project.

The concept of personal resonance is central to Taylor's BA-principle, and worth situating historically against its background in Romanticism. Taylor's historical narrative frequently comes back to Renaissance Neo-Platonism. People used to think of the cosmos of which they were a part as containing a moral order: reality had morality written into it. Taylor illustrates this bold-sounding claim by appealing to the writings of Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno, in particular to their theory of correspondences. Taylor sees the Romantics as yearning for this kind of connection, while acknowledging its impossibility in the post-Enlightenment era. As Taylor puts it: 'Platonism is dead.'²²⁶

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor summarizes the Romantic predicament as follows: 'where formerly poetic language could rely on certain publicly available orders of meaning, it now has to consist in a language of articulated sensibility.'²²⁷ Before I explore this idea of articulated sensibility, I want to explore Taylor's remark about publicly available orders of meaning. If Taylor is right, the Neo-Platonist correspondences appealed to the Romantics, because they constituted a publicly available order of meaning. It is tempting now to ask what exactly an order of meaning is supposed to be, and what it means for such an order to be publicly available. Can these notions withstand philosophical scrutinizing? What exactly is supposed to have been lost here? I think the most productive way of reading these remarks is to take them as making a

²²⁶ Taylor (1994: 210).

²²⁷ Taylor (1991: 84).

very general claim. The writings of Paracelsus urge that moral knowledge is no different from any other type of knowledge. Paracelsus believes that you can quite literally read in the stars how you should navigate your life, just as you can find out what medicine to give people by observing planetary movements.²²⁸ The correspondences give us a way of satisfying our yearning for direction. We do not have to understand how exactly this process worked for the followers of Paracelsus, or even believe that they found much consolation in astrology. It is sufficient, when trying to understand the Romantics, to find intelligible the yearning to be able to take moral direction from the stars.

This being said, the Romantics decidedly did not believe in the correspondences. However, they drew on the language of the correspondences in their poetry in order to produce an analogous guiding effect through different means. We can no longer be guided by the stars, but a poem about the stars might even for us come to have a guiding function:

It is not that one cannot write a poem about the correspondences. Baudelaire did. It is rather that this can't draw on the simple acceptance of the formerly public doctrines. The poet himself didn't subscribe to them in their canonical form. He is getting at something different, some personal vision he is trying to triangulate to through this historical reference, the "forest of symbols" that he sees in the world around him. But to grasp this forest, we need to understand not so much the erstwhile public doctrine (about which no one remembers any

²²⁸ Paracelsus (2008: 131-133).

details anyway) but, as we might put it, the way it resonates in the poet's sensibility.²²⁹

Here Taylor makes it clear that it does not really matter whether or not we can make sense of the original ideas about correspondence that we find in Paracelsus and his contemporaries. Instead, what matters is how the relevant imagery 'resonates in the poet's sensibility'. This idea is something that Taylor explains via the term 'triangulation'. When Baudelaire writes a poem about the correspondences, for example his 'L'âme du vin', which is structured around the ideas of drinking from Lethe, and drinking ambrosia, he is triangulating to a deeper meaning, which is only accessible through this 'subtler language'. But it is clear to the reader that the language in question is 'subtler', i.e., not intended as an ordinary public language: Baudelaire is not recommending a return to the language of the correspondences in our everyday discourse. Instead, he is constructing a language which works, only within the context of his poem, to evoke a certain imagery that allows the reader to grasp a meaning that Taylor sees located in an 'interspace'. We are not, literally, supposed to see ourselves as having drunk from Lethe and being healed by ambrosia. It is quite unclear what it would mean to hold such beliefs. However, within the context of the poem, these ideas become meaningful. Baudelaire has created a space in which the language of correspondences can again play an important role. The poem enables us to find meaning in this strange vocabulary. It does so because we understand these words as written by the poem's author to express his personal moral vision. As we read the poem, we come to understand why someone

²²⁹ Taylor (1991: 83-84).

would reach for these particular words in the context of this poem. It is in this sense that we triangulate to the meaning: the vocabulary, resonating with the poet's sensibility, opens up an interspace in which it is meaningful also to us outsiders. Having engaged with the poetry, we can then come to see our lives in the light of this experience.

In some Romantic poetry, such as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, this hearkening back to the correspondences is combined with a hope that, ultimately, poetry might help to re-establish public orders of meaning. While the Romantics understand that the language of the correspondences is dead, they hoped that it might be possible to breathe a new life into it through poetry, by transforming themselves and their readers and hence leading us back to a public order of meaning, but at a higher level. Taylor summarizes the early Romantic ambitions as follows:

We can see that the two crucial amendments to the tradition of languages of reality (or insight into reality) which the Romantics made pull in the same direction: (1) The Plan is no longer seen on the Platonic model as laid out in Ideas of perfection existing in eternity, but is rather understood as a direction of growth, towards which reality is tending; and (2) our grasp of the plan is also incapable of matching it exactly, but rather constitutes a kind of translation in our terms of its thrust. This opens onto an era of subtler languages and the corresponding ontic indeterminacy. Our artistic (or philosophical) creations can

be the locus of what I want to call “epiphanies”, which both (partially) reveal the Plan/direction of things, and put us in empowering contact with it.²³⁰

This passage claims that the Romantics conceived of their art as bringing us into alignment with a developing reality. The Neo-Platonists saw it as our task to align ourselves with a fixed order, which is written into nature. The Romantics no longer find this idea of a fixed order believable, but they are driven by a similar craving for alignment. They see reality as in flux: alignment is now something that is aimed for in the future. It requires tracing the plan according to which nature unfolds, and in so doing transforming ourselves in the right sort of way, in order ultimately to be able to establish a new public order of meanings.²³¹ Taylor calls these epiphanies ‘epiphanies of being’.

This idea of nature unfolding according to some fixed plan is dropped in the 19th century. Baudelaire's spleen poetry and Schopenhauer's image of nature as insatiable willing suggest that nature might be a chaotic, or even an evil force. This leads to a shift in epiphanic poetry. Post-Romantic epiphanies are no longer attempts to align the reader with the thrust of nature's plan, but rather aim to come to terms with reality in its chaotic, amoral, or evil form. Taylor has traced this development in great detail in *Cosmic Connections*, with Baudelaire being an important transitional figure between the two forms of epiphany. In *Sources of the Self*, the clearest example of the latter type of

²³⁰ Taylor (2017: 63).

²³¹ In his recent *Cosmic Connections*, Taylor shows how this ambition for future (re)connection with a public order of meanings is central to the poetry of Hölderlin and Novalis, as well as the early Wordsworth, and even some works of Baudelaire. He also shows how this ambition begins to wane by the mid-nineteenth century and is wholly dropped with the advent of Modernism. Taylor (2024).

epiphany, characteristic of modernism, is the 'framing epiphany' in Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' [1913]:

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of the faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.²³²

As briefly explained at the end of Chapter 3, where the epiphanies of Modernist art were introduced as a counterexample to Chappell's recognitionalist ethics, two distinct ideas are realistically portrayed in this poem. The artistic ingenuity lies in their juxtaposition, which allows the reader to see a deeper significance in each idea through their interplay. The idea of an interspace clearly remains important in such modernist poetry, but it is no longer the case that there is a triangulation to a specific meaning. There is no distinctive idea, or object, that becomes manifest in the poem. Instead, the poem sets up two ideas as a frame. The ideas resonate with each other, thereby rendering each idea deeper, but without taking us to a different, third idea.

3. Moral Sources as Epiphanic

Having sketched, very briefly, the history of epiphanic art, as Taylor conceives it, I now want to say some more about his concept of epiphany and relate it to the idea of moral sources. The term 'epiphany' comes from Greek 'ἐπιφάνεια', which means 'appearance' or 'manifestation'. According to Taylor, until the early 20th century, the term's use was

²³² Taylor (1989: 474).

confined to religious contexts, marking moments in which divinity manifests in the world. The Christian feast day *Epiphany* commemorates the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Christ and the wedding at Cana. All three are manifestations of divinity: Christ's physical manifestation to the gentiles, the holy spirit descending upon Christ, and the revelation of Christ's divinity when he turns water into wine. The first recorded non-religious use of the term 'epiphany' is in the writings of James Joyce.²³³ Joyce collected in a notebook forty events from ordinary life which he called epiphanies, and, particularly in his early work, suggested that it was a central purpose of his writing to capture epiphanies. It is not completely clear what Joyce meant by 'epiphany', but it is through the writings of Joyce that the term came to have its modern sense, meaning roughly 'moment of illumination'.²³⁴

Epiphanies were originally divine manifestations, and it is the idea of manifestation which led Joyce to use the term. What Joyce is trying to achieve, (or, better, what Stephen Daedalus is trying to achieve, for it is strictly speaking Daedalus', not Joyce's definition of 'epiphany' that is at issue here,) is to give a secular sense to the idea of a spiritual manifestation, without psychologizing. Stephen Daedalus defines epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.'²³⁵ He believes that it is 'for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most

²³³ Taylor (1989: 419). Chappell (2022: 40-41).

²³⁴ Chappell (2022: 41); Taylor (1989: 419).

²³⁵ Joyce (1944: 216).

delicate and evanescent of moments'²³⁶ Daedalus thinks that something of genuine spiritual significance can become manifest in literature and revealed through epiphany.

The idea that epiphanies are manifestations is equally crucial to Taylor's own use of the concept, despite the concept's religious origins. However, as the previous section shows, Taylor's concept of epiphany moves past the idea that epiphanies are manifestations of *something*. The idea that it is the task of epiphanic art to connect with a special kind of object was central to the Romantic conception, which hearkened back to the Neo-Platonist ideal of a moral order written into reality. However, the great epiphanies of modernism are precisely attempts to do away with this simple idea, focusing instead, as we saw with Pound, on the idea of connection. This suggests a similarity between Modernist poetry and my horizontal reading of Taylor proposed in the previous chapter. Just as the modernists let go of the idea that an epiphany must be a manifestation of a particular object, so Taylor's account of moral sources does away with the idea that greater articulacy in ethics is to be achieved through a vertical enquiry, i.e., through the direct study of something deeper that currently lies beyond our view. Instead, articulacy about moral sources requires making connections between judgments and ideas that are perfectly open to view and, taken individually, are no deeper than any other thought. Depth is achieved through connection, not by direct access to something inherently special. Is this analogy between Modernist epiphanies and Taylor's own account of ethics accidental? On the contrary, it seems to point to the crucial idea that

²³⁶ Joyce (1944: 216).

Taylor's vocabulary of moral sources is heavily influenced by his reading of the Romantics and the post-Romantics.

If there is indeed such a close connection between Taylor's claims in Part I and his understanding of Modernism, does this suggest that Part I is after all historically contingent? Being part of Taylor's proposed best account of modern life, Part I makes use of a vocabulary that is personally resonant to a modern sensibility. The moral reality with which this vocabulary is designed to make contact is postulated as permanent by the BA-principle. The permanent structures of moral life are what they are, independently of how articulate we are about them. But possible articulations of these structures are historically situated, and, in the modern era, dependent on personal resonance. This explains why Taylor switches vocabularies from work to work. The idea of a moral source, which dominates the entire narrative in *Sources of the Self*, is almost completely absent from *A Secular Age*, where the focus is instead on a sense of fulness.²³⁷ In the later *Cosmic Connections*, both of these terms are dropped in favour of the idea of connection.²³⁸ Taylor attempts to articulate permanent structures by finding personally resonant terms through which to bring them into view. Once again, we see the provisional nature of his realism: yes, moral sources are an anthropological constant – but it may be that the insight that finds expression in the concept of a moral source will require a (potentially transformative) re-expression in a different context.

²³⁷ Taylor (2007: 7-9).

²³⁸ Taylor (2024).

If it is right to see the vocabulary of moral sources as a historical product, traceable in particular to the legacy of Romanticism, what follows for the question at the beginning of this chapter about the relation between the two parts of *Sources of the Self*? Here, it helps to re-examine the following, expanded quotation from the end of the work:

The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through [...] personal resonance. This is true not only of epiphanic art but of other efforts, in philosophy, in criticism, which attempt the same search. This work, though it obviously fails of any epiphanic quality, falls into the same category. I have throughout sought language to clarify the issues, and I have found this in images of profound personal resonance like 'epiphany', 'moral sources', 'disengagement', 'empowering', and others. These are the images which enable me to see more clearly than I did before. They could, I believe, be the animating ideas of an epiphanic work, but that would require another kind of capacity. The great epiphanic work actually can put us into contact with the sources it taps. It can realize the contact. The philosopher or critic tinkers around and shapes images through which he or another might one day do so. The artist is like the race-car driver, and we are the mechanics in the pit; except that in this case, the mechanics usually have four thumbs, and they have only a hazy grasp of the wiring, much less than the drivers have.²³⁹

²³⁹ Taylor (1989: 512).

Stephen Mulhall has argued that this passage is 'startlingly self-contradictory'.²⁴⁰ It professes to rely on a vocabulary that is powerful by virtue of its personal resonance, but then denies that the work as a whole is epiphanic, because this personally resonant vocabulary does not on its own put us in contact with moral sources. This seems contradictory, in that Taylor:

[...] presupposes that a vocabulary might have profound personal resonances that enable its creator and his interlocutors to see the nature and depth of certain moral sources more clearly than before, and yet not put them in touch with or help them to realize those sources. But if this vocabulary can enable its creator and others to see a moral source more clearly, then it already has put them in contact with it; there is no further step to be taken.²⁴¹

The problem with Taylor's presentation of Part I and Parts II-V as separable is that Taylor's distinction between the two parts makes it seem as though the articulation of the permanent structures of moral life in Part I are independent of the BA-principle. This makes it seem as though Taylor's historical investigation takes the form it does because of a general philosophical truth about the structure of moral thought, which can be established in abstraction from history. This then makes Taylor's realism about goods seem problematic, because it is culturally situated. A contrast opens up between a solid moral realism, as exemplified in Taylor's claims about the universality of strong evaluation, and a presumptive realism about goods which is based on the BA-principle.

²⁴⁰ Mulhall (1996, 158).

²⁴¹ Mulhall (1996: 159).

In the light of Taylor's remarks about the epiphanic character of his vocabulary in Part I, it is clear that such a reading of Taylor would be a mistake. However, the fact that he denies that his work as a whole has an epiphanic quality, his idea that the philosopher just 'tinkers around', waiting for the artist to bring the true moral vision, and his remarks in the preface about the separability of Parts I and II-V, can make it seem as though Taylor does think that Part I articulates aspects of the modern identity which have nothing to do with best account reasoning or personal sensibility.

The best way to show that attempting to separate Part I from the BA-principle would be a mistake is to recall how the BA-principle works. Mulhall glosses Taylor's concept of best account reasoning as follows:

Taylor develops his conception of practical reasoning as a reasoning in transitions. The emphasis this places on comparative rather than absolute judgements, combined with its reliance on the model of biographical narrative, implies that the proper locus of moral argumentation is the confrontation between one person and another. A party to a moral dispute speaks from a perspective defined by the moral intuitions that her best reading of her own experience has delivered, and speaks to the perspective of her interlocutor, attempting to engage with the detailed texture of that other's experience and life story; it is a confrontation between two resolutely first-person viewpoints.

The competing notion that there might be a once-for-all, perspective-free, absolutely impersonal moral truth of any given matter is rejected[.]²⁴²

These remarks about Taylor's practical reasoning seem to fit Abbey's account of 'presumptive' reasoning. Both accounts indicate that in ethics there is no such thing as an absolutely impersonal truth: moral reasoning is always bound up with the BA-principle. This means that if Part I is to be independent of the BA-principle, it must be morally neutral. But it could not possibly be. The whole point of Taylor's project, beginning with the account of strong evaluation in 'What is Human Agency?' is to invite his readers to see that his account makes best sense of their lives. His argument for strong evaluation hinges on the claim that to be insensitive to strong evaluation is to lead a shallow life.²⁴³ In the light of these considerations, Mulhall suggests that, wherever Taylor appears to reach beyond the BA-principle, he is being misleading. In the next section, I will evaluate three suggested emendations to Taylor's project which arise from this conclusion.

4. Mulhall's Proposed Emendations

In an attempt to overcome the above-described tension in Taylor's work described above, Mulhall has suggested that *Sources of the Self* should be written '[o]nce more with feeling'.²⁴⁴ In particular, Mulhall envisages three changes to the work:

²⁴² Mulhall (1996: 155).

²⁴³ Taylor (1985: 26).

²⁴⁴ Mulhall (1996: 160).

1. Taylor should have avoided using the first-person plural. By speaking constantly of *our* history, Taylor makes it seem as though Western culture can be treated as though it were a person. But this seems incongruous with Taylor's conception of reasoning in transitions: 'if what matters in a moral argument is that one addresses the experience and intuitions of one's interlocutor with all the concrete detail and specificity that one can muster, then the very idea that one can so address a culture seems incoherent.'²⁴⁵
2. Taylor should have avoided presenting the best account he presents in Part I as if it were set in stone. Instead of presenting 'the permanent structures of moral life' in a third person account, with one philosophical 'must' following upon another, he should have presented these permanent structures as the structures which he personally views as the fixtures against the background of which we make our moral judgments.
3. Taylor should have avoided trying to draw clear disciplinary distinctions between philosophy and art, recognising instead that philosophical and artistic considerations inevitably go hand-in-hand in the attempt to present the kind of narrative of modernity in which he is interested.

If Mulhall is right, implementing these changes would improve Taylor's work on its own terms by ironing out inconsistencies that enter into Taylor's project because of a conception of philosophy as concerned with impersonal truths, which Taylor, despite his best efforts, is unable to shake. As the discussion in the previous section indicates, Mulhall's proposed emendations are well-motivated. However, in this section, I want to

²⁴⁵ Mulhall (1996: 157).

suggest that Taylor can to a certain extent be defended against Mulhall's criticisms by emphasizing the dialogical nature of the BA-principle.

Despite the personal nature of moral thought, the attempt to articulate best accounts is an inherently social endeavour. In 'The Politics of Recognition', Taylor writes that human life has a 'fundamental dialogical character'²⁴⁶, by which he means, among other things, that 'the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love [and] some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment.'²⁴⁷ This thought applies also to goods which are only accessible to us through personal sensibility. Sometimes, for example, we see the point of an artwork only as we come to enjoy it together with others. Just as we enjoy goods together, we must articulate them together. In this sense, Taylor's articulation project is inherently dialogical.

Mulhall criticizes Taylor's use of the first-person plural for obscuring the fact that the best account offered in *Sources* is a *personal* statement of the moral sources that are salient to *Taylor*. Mulhall believes that Taylor should not have had the ambition to write a biography of Western *culture*, because focusing on 'the culture' ignores individual differences, which, as Taylor himself repeatedly notes, are already in danger of becoming obscured in modernity.²⁴⁸ Taylor should have made it clear in his writing that he is making a *personal* contribution to the project of articulating the modern identity.

²⁴⁶ Taylor (1994: 32).

²⁴⁷ Taylor (1994: 33).

²⁴⁸ See for example the opening of the final chapter of *Sources*, where Taylor suggests that the central challenge of modernity is that we tend to agree in moral standards, but are often inarticulate about our underlying disagreements in sources. Taylor (1989: 495).

There is something clearly right about this criticism in that Taylor never reflects on the limitations that his account might face due to his unique position within the culture which he is trying to explain. However, there is also reason to think that dropping the first-person plural would come at a cost: a best account, as envisaged by Taylor, is something we develop *together*, precisely in order to give an account of our *shared* lives, which seems to make the first-person plural exactly the right register for Taylor to be using. *Sources of the Self* is Taylor's personal vision of our *shared* moral predicament, offered as the first of many possible accounts, which try to approximate a complete story about *our* moral sources.

Mulhall's second and third criticisms raise a related issue. Mulhall is right to point out that the separation between Part I and Parts II-V makes it seem as though the account in Part I is set in stone. However, it is not Taylor's intention to make it appear this way. Instead, the rationale Taylor himself gives for the separation is that it facilitates engagement with the book: those who are uninterested in history can read only Part I, those uninterested in philosophy can read only the rest of the book. Of course, this is a compromise, given Taylor's view that history and philosophy are intertwined, as Taylor would be the first to acknowledge, but it is a compromise *in the service of dialogue*. Even Taylor's confusing last-minute claim at the end of *Sources* that philosophy is inferior to art in that it cannot produce epiphanies might be seen as an attempt to hold onto a vision of realism as achievable through dialogue: philosophers *merely* articulate goods, rather than actually connecting us with them. But this means that anything that is part of the philosophical project can become part of a dialogue.

If these points are right, then the tensions which Mulhall points out in Taylor's work are part of Taylor's attempt to set up a dialogue with potential interlocutors who might help to improve the provisional best account that *Sources* puts forward. It is important to acknowledge these tensions. However, resolving them may not be as straightforward as Mulhall envisages. Would a restatement of *Sources* in the first-person *singular*, which intertwines history and theory throughout and unashamedly presents itself as a hybrid between philosophy and art obviously be more successful? Or would a rewriting along Mulhallian lines in fact make it harder for Taylor to find interlocutors who might help to articulate the modern identity by exposing fantasies in Taylor's own proposed best account? The question how Taylor's work might best succeed in getting the productive response from its interlocutors which the BA-principle demands will be a central concern as I compare Taylor's and Diamond's work in the following chapter.

5. Concluding Summary

This chapter has addressed the relation between theory and history in *Sources of the Self*, in so doing clarifying Taylor's BA-principle. The BA-principle is Taylor's way of developing a 'third alternative' to moral realism and projectivism. In developing such a 'third alternative', Taylor's work exemplifies the first feature of the realistic spirit: it transcends the dichotomy between realism and anti-realism. Both parts of *Sources*, the 'permanent truths' in Part I and the historical investigation in Parts II-V, form part of Taylor's best account. As part of a best account, all aspects of Taylor's work are open to contestation by a better account. This gives further support to the claim from Chapter 4 that Taylor's work also exemplifies the second feature of the realistic spirit, namely a

fantasy-avoiding structure of self-overcoming. Taylor's work exposes fantasy in other authors and in turn invites criticism from potential interlocutors. Taylor offers his best account as an attempt to start a conversation in which dialogue with other proposed accounts will show which of his own commitments are realistic, and which are fantasies. Together, Chapters 4 and 5 have shown that Taylor develops a promising approach to ethics, which can be seen to exemplify the realistic spirit.

This raises the question how Taylor's work might be thought to relate to Diamond's. I address this question in the following, final chapter by relating the thinking of both writers back to their shared Wittgensteinian influence.

Chapter 6: Articulatory and Surprises – Taylor and Diamond

Diamond's and Taylor's moral philosophical projects look radically different. Diamond writes occasional, critical articles, aiming to expose fantasies in other writers. She interweaves short chunks of argument with discussion of examples and frequently moves back and forth between different strands in her writings, largely avoiding taking concrete stances on moral issues. Taylor writes long monographs in an attempt to articulate his best account of modernity. He provides unified narratives, which take a concrete stance on the conflicts of modernity and how they might be resolved. Seeing Diamond's and Taylor's work thus contrasted makes it tempting to think that their projects could not possibly be seen as exemplifying the same underlying spirit: after all, they differ radically in both form and content. Nonetheless, I have argued that both Diamond's and Taylor's works manifest two key features of the realistic spirit: they transcend the dichotomy between realism and anti-realism and they endeavour to avoid fantasy.

This final chapter is an attempt to explain how this can be the case, and what we can learn from it. How is it that the Diamondian and Taylorian projects can be seen as exemplifying the same spirit, when they are so radically different? What does this tell us about the realistic spirit, and what does it tell us about how we might continue the quest for a realistic approach to ethics? I go about answering these questions by drawing on the shared roots that Diamond's and Taylor's moral philosophies have in Wittgenstein. Section 1 lays out the Wittgensteinian background to both Diamond's and Taylor's moral philosophical projects, going back to some basic ideas about the realistic spirit originally

developed in Chapter 1. I suggest that there are two different poles at work in the way in which Wittgenstein avoids fantasy in philosophy – he articulates backgrounds and he aims to surprise his readers. In Section 2, I show that Taylor and Diamond inherit Wittgenstein's work through these different poles, which gives rise to a tension between their respective projects in ethics. In Section 3, I argue that this tension suggests that, despite their best attempts to be realistic, Taylor and Diamond's projects may involve philosophical fantasies of their own, which can be overcome by moving more flexibly between attempts to articulate backgrounds and attempts to find fantasies in surprising places, as Wittgenstein himself does. In Section 4, I summarize the basic argument of this thesis and provide a brief trajectory for potential further work on the realistic spirit in ethics.

1. The Realistic Spirit in Wittgenstein

As shown in Chapter 1, the realistic spirit 1) moves beyond ostensibly fixed philosophical taxonomies, 2) avoids fantasy through (self-)criticism and 3) is not confined to philosophy. Diamond develops her account of the realistic spirit as exemplifying these three features in an attempt to characterize the work of Wittgenstein. In this section, I want to examine in detail the role that the first two features play in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and show how the second feature in particular gives rise to something that might look like a tension in Wittgenstein's thought.

Diamond's 'Realism and the Realistic Spirit' was presented in Chapter 1 as an attempt to explain what Wittgenstein meant when he wrote: 'Not empiricism and yet realism in

philosophy, that is the hardest thing.’ Diamond shows that, in order to understand Wittgenstein's remark, we must understand ‘realism’ here to mean ‘the realistic spirit’, not philosophical realism. Philosophical realism, as exemplified in Locke and Peirce's attempts to ground the distinctions between real things and chimeras (Locke) and causation and coincidence (Peirce), is something we need to overcome if we are to be realistic in our thinking, because philosophical realism is a fantasy: it merely *appears* to explain the distinctions it purports to explain. Berkeley and Ramsey make an attempt to overcome the fantasy of philosophical realism by providing alternative accounts of the respective distinctions, but in so doing accept structures as given, which turn out to constitute fantasies of their own. Wittgenstein, according to Diamond, moves beyond both of these attempts at realism that we find in the empiricist tradition by attacking the very explanatory demands which were at issue in the disputes between Locke, Peirce, Berkeley and Ramsey. The fantasies in these writers result from the fact that they all accept the idea that it *must* be possible to provide general accounts of the distinctions they are attempting to explain. They believe that it must be possible to provide an account which fixes, for all possible cases, what constitutes a real thing, and what a chimera, or what constitutes a causal connection and what a coincidence. In response to this demand, Diamond suggests that ‘the hardness of realism lies in not asking the questions’.²⁴⁹ Wittgenstein is realistic by showing that the quest for philosophical explanations of everyday distinctions is bound to fail. In attacking the underlying explanatory demands which give rise to realist and anti-realist positions, Wittgenstein's philosophy exemplifies the first feature of the realistic spirit.

²⁴⁹ Diamond (1991a: 70).

The second feature of the realistic spirit, its structure as a fantasy-avoiding and self-critical spirit, is obviously closely related to the first, in that Wittgenstein diagnoses both philosophical realism and anti-realism as fantasies. However, it adds an important further dimension to the realistic spirit in emphasizing that the realistic spirit, as well as being critical, is also *self*-critical and thus has a perfectionist dimension. In Chapter 1, I used the dialectic between Dummett, Winch and Diamond concerning how one might go about developing a Wittgensteinian account of truth to illustrate how the realistic spirit is self-critical, or, as I put it there, a spirit of self-overcoming. I now want to say some more about this self-overcoming, perfectionist dimension of the realistic spirit in Wittgenstein's own work.

It is tempting to think that once one has understood the realistic spirit, one can encapsulate this spirit in a philosophical methodology which then guarantees realism in one's thinking. This is what a certain type of quietist interpreter takes Wittgenstein to have done.²⁵⁰ This type of quietist believes that philosophy can guarantee realism by means of the Wittgensteinian method of 'bring[ing] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.'²⁵¹ It is tempting to think this, because Wittgenstein's method of looking to the everyday uses of words to explain their meaning can be an extremely powerful tool when trying to dissolve fantasies. When one encounters a philosophical problem, it is often very fruitful to ask how the words in terms of which the problem has been formulated are used in everyday contexts. By exploring the words' everyday uses,

²⁵⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the relation between quietism, fantasy-avoidance and the Diamond-Winch dialectic, see Chapter 1, Section 2b.

²⁵¹ Wittgenstein (1953: §116).

it can often be made clear that the way in which they are being employed in the philosophical context fails to do what it pretends to do. Wittgenstein's discussion of knowledge in the private-language-argument is an example of this strategy. Wittgenstein's interlocutor says that only *he* knows when he is in pain: others can only surmise it.²⁵² This claim generates a host of philosophical confusions, culminating in the claim that every person means something different by 'pain'. In response, Wittgenstein points to the way in which the concept of knowledge is connected with the concept of a mistake. To say that one knows something ordinarily involves acknowledging that one could potentially be mistaken. Wittgenstein's interlocutor tries to do away with this connection when he says that *only* he knows that he is in pain. He wants to say that he has a special form of access to the object of his knowledge, which makes his knowledge-claim infallible. Wittgenstein's response to this is: 'It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean—except perhaps that I *am* in pain?'²⁵³ In responding in this way, Wittgenstein suggests that his interlocutor's attempt to sever the connection between the concept of knowledge and the potential for mistakes deprives the knowledge claim of its sense. The idea that to say 'I know that I am in pain.' says more than 'I am in pain.' is a philosophical fantasy.

Wittgenstein's work is full of examples of this kind. Many remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* begin with an interlocutor asserting something, which is then shown to be a fantasy by a demonstration that the words used in the assertion have been severed from the context in which they were originally given a meaning. This methodology is

²⁵² Wittgenstein (1953: §246).

²⁵³ Wittgenstein (1953: §246).

enabled by the fact that words *depend* for their meanings on the broader context of their use. Dreyfus and Taylor have expressed this idea as follows:

Wittgenstein has shown how we cannot grasp the meanings of certain terms unless we see how they figure in the (social) language games they arise in. And these games in turn need to be placed within the whole *Lebensform* they help to constitute.²⁵⁴

Because words receive their meanings in language-games and language-games have a point as parts of a form of life, Wittgenstein can attack fantasy, and hence exemplify the realistic spirit, by returning words to the context of the language-games in which they receive a meaning and in turn relating language-games to the context of the form of life, or *Lebensform* of which they are a part. By articulating broader contexts of use, Wittgenstein demonstrates how fantasies are idle wheels which merely *appear* to do the work they purport to do.

The quietist temptation is to think that this methodology is guaranteed to capture the realistic spirit. However, as Winch's purportedly Wittgensteinian account of truth discussed in Chapter 1 indicates, this is not so. Winch attempts to dispel the Dummettian fantasy that for a proposition to be true is for it to correspond to an independently existing metaphysical fact by describing the role that the concept of truth plays in various different language-games. Winch takes himself to be returning the concept of

²⁵⁴ Dreyfus and Taylor (2015: 105).

truth from a confused, philosophical use to its everyday use, precisely by explaining its role in various language-games. However, as Diamond shows, Winch's account of truth unintentionally collapses into a form of anti-realism, by effectively reducing truth to 'assertibility within a language-game', missing the importance of connections we make *between* language-games. Winch's account collapses into anti-realist fantasy *despite* the fact that he does his best to employ Wittgenstein's articulation-methodology. This suggests that the quietists are wrong: paying attention to broader contexts of use, articulating how words fit into language-games and language-games into forms of life, does not *guarantee* realism, even though it can be a powerful tool for the realistic spirit to employ.

What goes wrong in Winch's attempt at realism, and in the corresponding quietist thought that articulating broader contexts is a fail-safe way of avoiding fantasy, is best understood by turning to a second dimension of Wittgenstein's approach. Sometimes the best way to expose philosophical fantasies is not to attack the fantasies directly, but to target the underlying explanatory demands which gave rise to them. This aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy was illustrated above in his attack on the realist/anti-realist dichotomy. The mistake made by philosophers such as Berkeley and Ramsey is that, while they very successfully expose the fantasy of philosophical realism, they collapse into a form of anti-realist fantasy instead, because they accept the same explanatory demand as their realist interlocutors. A related misfortune befalls Winch when he accepts the Dummettian idea that for a proposition to be true, there must be something in virtue of which it is true. Winch thinks he can meet Dummett's explanatory demand by showing how the truth of a proposition is determined by the language-game in which

it is situated. But this makes it impossible for Winch to see the importance of the connections we make *between* language-games.

Diamond illustrates the importance that attacking illegitimate explanatory demands has in Wittgenstein's philosophy in a discussion of the following remark from *Philosophical Investigations*:

If I am inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation out of grey rags and dust, I shall do well to examine those rags very closely to see how a mouse may have hidden in them, how it may have got there and so on. But if I am convinced that a mouse cannot come into being from these things, then this investigation will perhaps be superfluous.

But first we must learn to understand what it is that opposes such an examination of details in philosophy.²⁵⁵

The mouse, in this analogy, stands for philosophical fantasies. We sometimes fail to see where our fantasies come from, because we assume that they could not possibly be generated by 'grey rags and dust'. Wittgenstein's point is that, often, we do well in philosophy to examine the rags and dust, to look in places where we do not *expect* to find the origin of our difficulties. When Wittgenstein attacks illegitimate explanatory demands he does precisely this: he directs our attention to a part of our thinking which we deemed completely innocent and shows that the real source of fantasy lies there.

²⁵⁵ Wittgenstein (1953: §53), as quoted by Diamond in Diamond (1991a: 47).

This aspect of Wittgenstein's work was so important to him, he even considered adopting it as a motto:

Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things that look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different. I was thinking of using as a motto for my book a quotation from *King Lear*: 'I'll show you differences.' [*laughing*:] The remark, 'You'd be surprised' wouldn't be a bad motto either.²⁵⁶

Wittgenstein was committed to showing differences, to surprising his readers where they can see only one option, only one way of approaching a particular philosophical problem.

What the above discussion shows is that Wittgenstein's attempt to avoid fantasy in philosophy has two related poles: 1. Wittgenstein attacks fantasies by articulating broader contexts. He shows how words fit into language-games and language-games into forms of life, in order to demonstrate that fantasies are distortions of these relations, which merely *appear* to be meaningful. 2. Wittgenstein attacks the underlying explanatory demands which give rise to the fantasies, showing us that, surprisingly, these demands, which looked to be innocent, are often the real source of our troubles.

²⁵⁶ Remark to M. O'C. Drury, 1948. Reported in Drury (1996: 157).

Very often, these two aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking work harmoniously together. However, there is reason to think that they can also come into tension with each other. The attempt to articulate forms of life, to explain how various concepts hang together in language-games which are in turn related to one-another in various ways, has an in-built tendency towards systematicity. As soon as one sees the great power that Wittgenstein's philosophical machinery for articulating forms of life has when it comes to dissolving fantasies, it is tempting to try to become as articulate as possible about one's concepts and practices in order to avoid fantasy. The quietist, as conceived above, falls for a temptation of this sort. The problem is that this misses the fact that fantasy often arises where we least expect it. While the realistic spirit is indeed often tasked with the articulation of contexts of use, it must also frequently be able to *surprise* us, by finding the sources of fantasy in *unlikely* places. Winch's failure to be realistic nicely illustrates how these two forces can come into tension: Winch exposes the fantasy in Dummettian realism by articulating how the concept of truth is used in various language-games, but *in so doing* falls for a new, anti-realist fantasy. Winch's very attempt to articulate how the concept of truth works in various language-games is his downfall, because, as Diamond points out, there is an underlying problem with the innocent-looking Dummettian explanatory demand which Winch thinks he can accept without incurring any difficulties.

Focusing on articulation can lead one to overlook surprising sources of fantasy, but limiting oneself to the search for illegitimate explanatory demands leaves one without the ability to explain why the demands are illegitimate. Wittgenstein's realistic spirit is dependent on both features, articulating forms of life *and* finding sources of fantasy in

surprising places, despite the fact that they can occasionally come into conflict with each other, as exemplified in the Dummett-Winch-Diamond dialectic. Wittgenstein is flexible in the way in which he employs these two features in his work: sometimes he sketches an important set of connections between concepts in order to overcome a fantasy, while at other times he points to a particular thought, or question, suggesting that, if we were to stop asking this question, our problems would disappear.

The tension between articulating forms of life and identifying surprising sources of fantasy is emblematic of the realistic spirit's nature as a spirit of self-overcoming. Every attempt to overcome fantasy can breed fantasy of its own. One occasion on which this tends to happen is when we become too comfortable with the vocabulary by means of which we expose fantasies. Sometimes, it is precisely when we think, as Winch did, that our articulation-project is guarding us against fantasy that we need someone to surprise us by pointing out that our own attempts to expose fantasy in others have become the 'rags and dust' from which fantasy grows.

In summary, Wittgenstein's work exemplifies the two features of the realistic spirit which were introduced as criterial in Chapter 1: it overcomes the realist/anti-realist dichotomy and in so doing exemplifies a perfectionist, fantasy-avoiding structure of self-overcoming. Wittgenstein's work also further illustrates that there can be tension in the attempt to avoid fantasy: avoiding fantasy often requires articulating broader contexts, 'bring[ing] words back to their everyday use', but it also sometimes requires surprises, for example when seemingly innocent explanatory demands need to be exposed as

generating fantasies. Wittgenstein moves flexibly between these two poles, employing one method, or the other, or both together, as appropriate.

2. Articulacy and Surprises – Taylor and Diamond

In this section, I suggest that the differences between Taylor and Diamond's approaches to ethics can be traced back to the two poles in Wittgenstein's way of exemplifying the realistic spirit: Taylor's ethics attempts to avoid fantasy by *articulating backgrounds*, whereas Diamond's ethics is focused on *surprising* her readers by pointing out where other moral philosophers have accepted illegitimate explanatory demands. The fact that Taylor and Diamond prioritize different aspects of Wittgenstein's work in the way in which they inherit his spirit explains why their moral philosophies can in important respects appear to be in tension, despite exemplifying the same spirit. In Section 3, I show how, in giving priority to just one pole of the realistic spirit, each respective philosophy collapses into a fantasy of its own, which can be overcome by emulating Wittgenstein's flexibility in moving between the two poles. In Section 4, I finish with a general conclusion about the realistic spirit in ethics.

Taylor's ethics is built around the idea that if we are to be realistic in ethics, we must become articulate about moral sources. He gives two reasons for this²⁵⁷: If we are inarticulate about moral sources, i) we are unable to justify our strongly evaluative judgments to those who do not already share them, and ii) we cannot make proper

²⁵⁷ For more detailed discussion, see Chapter 4, Section 3.

connections between our strongly evaluative judgments.²⁵⁸ Both of these features are crucial, because our strong evaluations are meaningful only in relation to each other. To be articulate about moral sources is to be able to show how various goods hang together, how they form a structure which makes sense of each of them. To be aware of such a structure is important both when trying to explain individual evaluative judgments to others, because each judgment can then be justified by relating it to other judgments, and for our own self-understanding, because without a sense of how various goods are connected, we could not fully appreciate why any individual good has a claim on us. It is only through its connections with other goods that any given good has depth. Taylor's attempt to articulate the complex relations between strong evaluations, in order to explain how each individual evaluative judgment is meaningful, is an application of the Wittgensteinian idea that in order to understand particular words or judgments it is important to situate them in the broader context of their use.

Taylor's commitment to articulacy is, much like Wittgenstein's, designed to overcome philosophical fantasies, as the BA-principle illustrates. The purpose of articulating the backgrounds against which our moral judgments make sense is to show which goods are real, and which are mere projections. As we become more articulate, it is shown which goods are doing actual work, and which are not. Comparing different possible articulations, different proposed best accounts, shows merely projected goods up for the fantasies that they are. As argued in Chapter 5, the BA-principle applies not just to claims about goods made as part of Taylor's genealogical narrative, but also to his

²⁵⁸ Taylor (1989: 92).

proposed permanent philosophical truths articulated in Part I. The entirety of *Sources of the Self* should be read as an attempt to sketch a best account of the modern identity, which Taylor offers as an antidote to the fantasies of reductionistic naturalism. In this form, Taylor's entire project can be seen as inheriting the first pole of Wittgenstein's fantasy-avoiding methodology: it aims to overcome fantasies in ethics by *articulating* the structure of our moral identities.

In contrast, Diamond's ethics is built around the idea that fantasy tends to breed where we least expect it. She develops her moral philosophy very much around the second pole of Wittgenstein's approach, focusing on surprising her readers. Diamond almost never articulates how she sees various moral issues connecting. Instead, Diamond's articles tend to provide an exposition of somebody else's moral thought and then hone in on a particular fantasy-generating feature of this person's thinking, showing how that feature is responsible for generating fantasies and should hence be dropped (often bringing down the entire project with it). This is illustrated very clearly in Diamond's criticism of Lovibond, which, at root, is an attempt to show that beginning a moral philosophical enquiry with the question 'What is ethics about?' is bound to produce fantasy.²⁵⁹ While Diamond's discussion of Lovibond mentions an enormous variety of examples of moral discourse, which it would be interesting to investigate each in its own right, Diamond confines herself to stating these examples in order to show where Lovibond's account becomes fantastical. She never traces the connections one might

²⁵⁹ See Chapter 2, Section 3.

make between the examples, failing to provide anything close to the kind of articulation of moral sources we see in Taylor.

As indicated in the previous section, the two poles in Wittgenstein's realistic spirit can come into tension with each other. The focus on articulacy and backgrounds can itself become a philosophical fantasy. I want to suggest that this fact leads to a problematic tension between Taylor's and Diamond's ethics, which can be illustrated by developing a brief Diamondian criticism of Taylor's articulation project. I do so by drawing on Diamond's criticism of Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty in 'How Old Are These Bones?', which suggests that it can be a dangerous source of philosophical fantasy to assume that being realistic requires investigating commonalities and differences in our linguistic backgrounds.²⁶⁰

Rorty and Putnam disagree over the question whether if a 17th-century person, say *Leibniz*, had speculated that some bones found at Woozey are millions of years old, he would have been right. Given that there were no methods available for verifying such a claim in the 17th-century, Rorty thinks that the claim would have meant something different in the mouth of *Leibniz* than it does when we make it today, meaning that we should not say of *Leibniz* that his speculation was true. *Leibniz's* 17th-century utterance was neither true nor false, qua 17th-century-unverifiable. If we are inclined to say that what he said was true, we are not referring to his utterance, but merely paying a tribute to the sentence 'The bones found at Woozey are millions of years old.' We confer on

²⁶⁰ Diamond and Gerrard (1999).

that sentence our *contemporary* interpretation, which is bound up with the method of carbon dating, our understanding of the history of geology, etc. – *our* background, not his.

Putnam responds to Rorty that we *can* say that *Leibniz's* actual statement was true, because, even though there was no carbon dating in *Leibniz's* time, there is sufficient continuity between *Leibniz's* thinking and our own to enable genuinely shared meanings despite major differences in available modes of verification. 17th-century *Leibniz* in many important respects shares our conception of what the world is, what history is, what science is, and how facts about the past can be investigated. It is true that we have available methods of investigation of which *Leibniz* was ignorant, but these new methods fit into a conceptual space which we share with the people of the 17th-century. It is in virtue of this shared background understanding of what it means for something to exist at a particular time that we can say of *Leibniz* that his speculation was right, even though the speculation was not, for him, connected with some of the special methods of verification which we employ today.

Diamond agrees with Putnam that *Leibniz's* speculation would have been true, but she worries about Putnam's idea that we can say this in virtue of a shared background understanding. Her point is not that Putnam exaggerates the continuity between our thinking and that of *Leibniz*. Rather, she thinks that both Putnam and Rorty are making a mistake in tying the possibility of communication to the question of backgrounds in this case. Instead, she takes it as her starting point that we *do* believe that *Leibniz* was right in his speculation. We do not *first* have to ascertain whether there is enough of a

shared background for us to take his utterance to be true. Background understandings do not enter into the matter.²⁶¹ It is only when philosophers get involved that problems begin to arise. Rorty and Putnam both ask *how* it is possible for us to take *Leibniz'* utterance for true when there is a difference in background. Diamond wants to say that this question is itself fantasy-producing. We understand *Leibniz*, and what he says is true. To demand that it be explained *in virtue of what* we can say that *Leibniz'* utterance is true suggests either that our understanding of *Leibniz* is conditional upon our recognition that we share a scientific background (Putnam), or that, contrary to appearances, we do not understand *Leibniz* at all (Rorty). Diamond believes that both of these are fantasies.

Having sketched these Diamondian worries about the philosopher's craving for articulacy, it is natural to ask whether Taylor might be guilty of the same mistake as Putnam when he insists that any given moral judgment has its force only in relation to a particular background. Will it not be a contextual matter when such backgrounds are relevant, and when they are not? Each of Taylor's reasons for being articulate can be queried from a Diamondian perspective: i) Is it true that we must be able to *justify* our moral beliefs to others in order to converse with them successfully about ethics? ii) Is it true that we *must* be articulate about moral sources if we are properly to grasp the value of life goods? The Diamondian point to make concerning the first question would be to stress that the demand for justification is often itself misplaced. Sometimes, people are simply wrong to demand justifications. Under such circumstances, instead of finding

²⁶¹ Diamond and Gerrard (1999: 118).

justifications for one's moral commitments, it is sometimes best instead to examine where one's interlocutor's thinking has gone awry.²⁶² For instance, when Peter Singer demands that Diamond show what makes severely disabled human beings more worthy of medical treatment than healthy chimpanzees, Diamond's response is not to give a justification, but to argue that Singer is wrong to demand one. She accuses him of having lost a concept.²⁶³ Elaborating on the second question in a Diamondian spirit, one might point to the self-sufficiency of various life-goods. Would a parent's inarticulacy about their love for their children imply that this love is somehow insufficient, that it lacks depth? Is it not often the case that we are inarticulate precisely about those goods which have the greatest depth, because that they are deeply significant goes without saying? Of course, articulacy can be extraordinarily valuable in coming to terms with one's ethical ideas, but in the light of these two Diamondian responses to Taylor's arguments for articulacy, Taylor's categorical tone in exalting the value of articulacy seems questionable. This suggests that there is a real tension between Taylor's and Diamond's ethics. In its attempt to expose surprising sources of fantasy, Diamond's work claims that the quest for articulacy about backgrounds, which is the main driver of Taylor's ethics, can itself be a source of fantasy. Taylor and Diamond make contradictory recommendations concerning how ethics is to be approached. Whereas Taylor attempts to be realistic by articulating backgrounds, Diamond tries to avoid articulating positive conceptions in her moral philosophy, confining herself to criticism.

²⁶² Diamond conducts an extensive investigation into the concept of misguided thinking in Diamond (2019).

²⁶³ See Diamond (1991c) and Diamond (1988).

This section has shown how both Diamond's and Taylor's ethics grow out of a Wittgensteinian commitment to the realistic spirit. However, Taylor and Diamond prioritize different poles of this spirit, leading to a tension between their moral philosophies concerning the role articulacy might play in a realistic ethics. In the next section, I want to suggest that this tension is based on fantasies in each writer: the idea that it is possible to guarantee realism in ethics by relying exclusively on articulacy (Taylor), or exclusively on surprising criticisms (Diamond), is an illusion.

3. The Fantasy of a Guaranteed Realism

At the beginning of this thesis, I noted that it is tempting, having recognised that every attempt to avoid fantasy can breed fantasy of its own, to try to find a way of avoiding fantasy altogether. If this is tempting in philosophy quite generally, it is especially tempting in ethics, where being in the grip of fantasy can be a much more serious matter. I want to suggest that the tension between Taylor and Diamond's projects results from different attempts to come to terms with the anxiety-inducing fact that no attempt at realism in ethics is immune to fantasy.

a) Taylor

Taylor's way of guarding against fantasy in his own writings is to make his entire articulation project provisional. Taylor articulates his own best account of modernity not just to expose the fantasies of reductionistic naturalism, but also to invite criticism. He repeatedly stresses that moral realism should be, as Abbey puts it, *presumptive*, which means that, while Taylor is fully committed to his account as he presents it, he hopes

for it to be improved as it comes into contact with possible alternatives. Taylor's way of acknowledging the possibility that his own articulation project might be vitiated by fantasy is to call for the articulation of alternative accounts as possible correctives.

The challenge Taylor faces is that *Sources of the Self* did not produce the response that he had hoped for. While there has been much critical discussion of Taylor's work, as illustrated in the various criticisms of Taylor discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, nobody put forward an alternative best account of ethics in modernity on anything like the same scale as Taylor. What is more, most of the critical responses Taylor has received have come from authors who are broadly sympathetic to his project. The reductive naturalists who are Taylor's main target have largely failed to engage with his work.

Having not stimulated the conversation for which he had hoped, Taylor went on to write *A Secular Age*²⁶⁴, which introduces an almost completely new analytic vocabulary to provide an even more fine-grained narrative account of the genesis of secular modernity from originally Christian sources. After *A Secular Age*, Taylor writes *The Language Animal*²⁶⁵ and *Cosmic Connections*²⁶⁶, focusing on theories of language in the enlightenment era and their influence on Romantic poetry. Again, the vocabulary in terms of which these latest studies are couched is radically different from both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*. The subject matter is also now somewhat different. Having in *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* very much focused on the importance of theism as moral source, the two later books have a more secular feel.

²⁶⁴ Taylor (2007).

²⁶⁵ Taylor (2016).

²⁶⁶ Taylor (2024).

I want to suggest that the way in which Taylor proceeds from one book to the next is an attempt to keep faith with his presumptive realism in spite of the lack of response. As noted, the path from *Sources of the Self*, via *A Secular Age* to *The Language Animal* and *Cosmic Connections* shows Taylor's historical analyses becoming increasingly fine-grained: Taylor pays ever greater attention to articulacy as his writing progresses. It seems as though, in lieu of a response from critics, Taylor attempts to keep faith with his presumptive realism by *himself* trying to provide different, more fine-grained, better accounts, as he moves from monograph to monograph. His books are not presented as together providing a single, unified narrative: they each provide a new best account, with a new analytic vocabulary, a new structure, and increasingly more historical detail. Having failed to stimulate a dialogue, Taylor writes a series of monologues, aiming at each stage to articulate ever richer backgrounds by means of new empowering vocabularies, attempting to be as realistic as he can by making his views as transparent and as comprehensive as possible.

Is this a promising way of avoiding fantasy in ethics? The best way to answer this question is to ask why it is that Taylor's works have not received the kind of response which they call for. In a review of *A Secular Age*, Laitinen complains that the book is in need of better copyediting:

At places it is unbearably difficult to follow where the second point will come, after Taylor has announced that he will make two points— sometimes they are separated by seventy pages, sometimes thirty pages, and there are countless

further first and second points in between. Given the potential importance of the volume, it was a missed chance not to have it copyedited more thoroughly[.]²⁶⁷

I want to suggest that Laitinen's complaint points towards a deep problem with Taylor's articulation project. The difficulty in copyediting Taylor's later works is that as Taylor's historical analyses become increasingly fine-grained, they become increasingly unwieldy. Laitinen is right that the narrative in *A Secular Age* is sometimes very difficult to follow, but it is not obvious that better *copyediting* could have resolved the problem. The challenge instead seems to be that the work contains so much material that it is barely possible to present it in a manageable form. I want to suggest that Taylor's ambition to articulate the predicament of modernity as comprehensively as he can is an important reason why his works have not generated the critical response he had hoped for. To provide anything like a rival account to what Taylor does in works such as *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* would seem to require providing an equally detailed historical narrative. But it is not obvious that this is a reasonable thing to demand of an interlocutor. Might this suggest there is a fantasy involved in the idea that the best way to make progress in moral philosophy would be for each of us to become as articulate as possible about our moral background? Is the fact that Taylor presents one narrative after another *without* managing to stimulate the kind of dialogue that would be necessary for a best account to be properly tested an indicator that his attempt at realism fails by its own lights?

²⁶⁷ Laitinen (2010: 355).

The problem with Taylor's attempt to generate a critical conversation about different possible accounts of modernity by articulating the most detailed and comprehensive narrative he can muster is that Taylor's very commitment to articulacy becomes a hindrance to dialogue. The more articulate Taylor's narratives become, the harder it is to see what a rival narrative might look like: too great are the demands that Taylor's work places on potential interlocutors. In the light of this conclusion, it seems as though Taylor's prioritization of articulacy becomes a philosophical fantasy of its own. Articulation congeals into a fixed philosophical methodology without any room being left for the kind of surprising intervention that is characteristic of the second pole of the realistic spirit as it manifests in Wittgenstein. But a surprising intervention seems to be what is needed, if Taylor's work is to enter into a productive, navigable dialogue with those whom he criticizes.

b) Diamond

The way in which Diamond applies Wittgenstein's realistic spirit in other areas of philosophy does not prioritize one pole over the other. Diamond sometimes exposes illegitimate philosophical demands as confused, but also articulates broader contexts. For example, in 'Rules: Looking in the Right Place', Diamond offers an extensive discussion of the concept of description, by looking at crucial differences in the way the concept is employed in our language, and in the discourse of Kashgar villagers.²⁶⁸ By contrast, in her ethics, articulation of broader contexts is rare. Diamond largely confines

²⁶⁸ Diamond (1989: 25).

herself to criticism of the work of other philosophers. I want to suggest that this is Diamond's way of responding to the concern that producing fantasy in ethics is a particularly serious matter.

To articulate backgrounds in ethics is to take a personal stance – a stance which can be wrong, or confused. The positive views one holds in ethics are not immune to fantasy. One possible response to this anxiety-inducing fact is to try to avoid bringing one's own commitments into moral philosophy. It is tempting to think that, if one confines oneself to pointing to fantasy in *other* thinkers, if one confines oneself to the 'you'd be surprised' dimension of Wittgensteinian philosophy and refrains from articulating one's own views, one can avoid fantasy altogether. This seems to be what Diamond tries to do.

However, as the discussion in Chapter 2 already began to make clear, attempting to take a *purely* critical approach to ethics leads to an internal tension: it is not, in fact, possible to engage in moral philosophy without taking a stance. It was shown in Chapter 2 that Diamond's criticism of Lovibond depends on the claim that various pieces of discourse constitute ethically significant thinking, suggesting that whether Diamond's criticisms actually work will depend on being able to show that her examples are indeed ethically significant. A similar tension emerges in Diamond's account of the concept 'human being', which is a central, recurring topic in Diamond's ethics. In 'Losing Your Concepts' and 'Eating Meat and Eating People' Diamond accuses Peter Singer of having lost the concept; in 'The Importance of Being Human' she tries to explain what the significance of the concept is; in 'The Problem of Impiety' she explains the concept's connections

with impiety and suggests that the two concepts are being eroded together.²⁶⁹ Diamond often points to the concept 'human being' in order to expose philosophical fantasies, but confines her account of the concept to the claims that human beings have names, not numbers, that the human dead are not something to eat, and that intercourse with Chimpanzees is not akin to miscegenation, but constitutes a violation of human dignity.²⁷⁰ Each of these claims plays an important role in undermining a particular philosophical fantasy in the work of one of Diamond's interlocutors, which is why Diamond makes them, but it is clear that Diamond's discussions rely on a much richer conception of what it means to be human than she spells out. That Diamond never articulates this broader conception leaves those she criticizes with the sense that she has made it insufficiently clear what her position actually is.²⁷¹

Diamond's ethics exposes fantasies in other writers, but never presents enough of a 'position' to offer a target for a rebounding charge of succumbing to fantasy. This seems to be very much a deliberate feature of Diamond's ethics, designed to avoid the risk of infecting others with fantasies that might vitiate her own moral views. The problem is that, at some level, Diamond's criticisms of other philosophers normally *do* depend on positive conceptions – conceptions which play a role in Diamond's work, but are not properly articulated, as exemplified in Diamond's remarks about the concept of ethics, discussed in Chapter 2, and in her discussion of the concept 'human being'. This suggests that Diamond's ethics is itself in the grip of a fantasy: in ostensibly confining itself to criticism, Diamond's ethics pretends to be free of positive ethical views, but, contrary to

²⁶⁹ Diamond (2007).

²⁷⁰ Diamond (1991c).

²⁷¹ See for example McMahan (2005: Section 5).

appearances, her criticisms of other writers depend on personal conceptions, which Diamond's work obscures, instead of articulating.

In summary, one might then say the following about the tension between Taylor and Diamond's ethics: Diamond and Taylor draw on the two different poles of Wittgenstein's approach in an attempt to come to terms with the fact that there is no way of guaranteeing that the positive contributions one makes to ethics are free of fantasy. Taylor seeks to become maximally articulate in an attempt to render his thinking as transparent as he can to potential interlocutors who might improve his best account by exposing fantasies in his thinking which were obscure to him. He tries to make his own perspective, his own best account, as explicit as he possibly can in order to present all dimensions of his view as possible targets for critique. Diamond, by contrast, having recognised that every perspective in moral philosophy is likely to be riddled with fantasy, tries to avoid articulating a perspective altogether. She articulates positive conceptions of the ethical only to the extent that it is absolutely necessary to do so in order to dispel a particular fantasy, but taking care never to allow her thinking to congeal into a concrete position. Both of these attempts to avoid fantasy in ethics involve fantasies of their own. Taylor's attempt to render his writing maximally transparent to potential interlocutors in fact undermines the possibility of response, by placing excessive demands on the form the response must take. Diamond's attempt to criticize other writers without articulating a particular perspective in fact covertly relies on various concrete moral views.

Each of the fantasies which vitiate Diamond's and Taylor's ethics is the result of clinging to just one pole of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy and allowing it to congeal into a fixed method for fantasy-avoidance. In this way, Diamond and Taylor differ from Wittgenstein, who moves flexibly between the two poles, articulating backgrounds and pointing to surprising sources of fantasy each when appropriate. If one accepts that there is no fail-safe way of keeping fantasy out of one's moral philosophy, one can embrace the flexibility inherent in Wittgenstein's work: one can do one's best to avoid fantasy by in any given situation prioritizing whichever aspect of the Wittgensteinian structure seems most fitting, while accepting that, on occasion, one will go wrong. This suggests that the tension between Diamond's and Taylor's projects could be made to disappear by emending each to embrace this Wittgensteinian flexibility. Diamond's criticisms of other writers could be supplemented by a positive articulation of the way in which Diamond envisages her examples hanging together. An account could be developed of what Diamond means by ethics, possibly following my suggestion in Chapter 2 that ethics is characterized by a web of resemblances. Related investigations could be conducted into other central concepts in Diamond's work, such as 'guidance' and 'human being'. It might be particularly fruitful to apply some of Taylor's philosophical methodology to Diamond's work, exploring, for example, to what extent her work on guidance might be thought to fit into the Romantic legacy from which Taylor derives his concept of epiphany. Correspondingly, the rich tapestry of moral ideas developed in Taylor's work could be redeployed much more flexibly once liberated from the *requirement* for articulacy. The central project of *Sources of the Self*, defending the importance of moral sources against naturalist reductionism, could be recast in different forms, which are more likely to prompt a response from potential interlocutors.

Mulhall's criticisms of Taylor from Chapter 5 might, with certain caveats, be a fruitful starting point for such a project. With emendations which reintroduce the flexibility of Wittgenstein's philosophy to Diamond and Taylor's ethics, their projects would become different but compatible, possibly even complementary attempts to approach ethics in a realistic spirit.

4. Ethics in a Realistic Spirit – Conclusions and Trajectories

The central purpose of this thesis has been to articulate what it might mean to approach ethics in a realistic spirit. Chapter 1 explained how Diamond derives the realistic spirit from the works of Wittgenstein and suggested that the realistic spirit has three features: 1) the realistic spirit moves beyond the philosophical opposition between realism and anti-realism; 2) the realistic spirit is a fantasy-avoiding spirit with a self-critical, perfectionist dimension; 3) the realistic spirit is not distinctively philosophical. Chapter 2 explored how Diamond applies the realistic spirit to ethics. It was shown that many contemporary attempts at moral realism fail to be realistic by reaching for philosophical fantasies, which Diamond dispels by arguing that ethics lacks a subject matter. However, Diamond's own attempts to oppose these fantasies were shown to rest on a conception of ethics which she herself never fully articulates. I suggested that Diamond's work on ethics could be seen as beginning to map out a web of resemblances which characterize the concept of ethics. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explored Sophie Chappell's and Charles Taylor's attempts to say something more concrete about the concept of ethics. It was argued that Chappell's work falls back on the fantasy of philosophical realism, but Taylor's work was shown to exemplify a genuine realistic spirit by providing a powerful

account of the ethical as articulable through a structure of horizontal relations between moral commitments.

In this final chapter, I have examined the question how moral philosophies which look as radically different as Taylor's and Diamond's can nonetheless be thought to exemplify the same spirit. I explored the different poles exemplified in Wittgenstein's attempts to avoid philosophical fantasies and suggested that the differences between Taylor's and Diamond's ethics stem from the fact that they inherit different aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking. The way in which they inherit these aspects leads to a fundamental tension between the two writers. In an attempt to avoid fantasy in their own approaches to ethics, they each attempt to guarantee realism by subordinating their ethics either to the Wittgensteinian quest for articulacy (Taylor), or to the Wittgensteinian commitment to show differences and surprise (Diamond). I showed that both of these attempts involve fantasies of their own. If these fantasies are overcome, there is no tension between Taylor's and Diamond's work. They can then each articulate and surprise flexibly, as the particular situation in which they find themselves demands. This brings both thinkers closer to Wittgenstein, whose later work is characterized throughout by this flexibility of method. If Diamond allowed herself to articulate her own views in ethics more, her critical writings would have greater force, and it might become possible to overcome other hidden fantasies in her thinking which are currently buried behind her critical methodology. If Taylor were to drop his commitment to achieving realism exclusively through articulacy, he might have more success in stimulating interesting, productive conversations in ethics. Given the considerable interest that Diamond's and Taylor's works already have in their current form, there is reason to think that the

attempt further to develop their realist projects in ethics without the fantasies that currently constrain them would be very fruitful.

In this thesis, I have tried to draw flexibly on both poles of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy by articulating criterial features of the realistic spirit while allowing myself to be surprised as to where and how these features might have application. By combining these two trajectories – a quest for articulacy and a willingness to be surprised – I happened upon the connection between Taylor and Diamond's work. I hope that, in providing a reasonably detailed account of their very successful attempts to approach ethics in a realistic spirit, this thesis can serve as a guide for future attempts to keep faith with the same realist project.

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