

*Other Eyes:*  
*An Essay on The Power of The Human Gaze*

By  
James Anthony Laing

UCL

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I, James Anthony Laing confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I provide an account of a certain form of interpersonal self-consciousness and its role in human social life. In Part One, I argue that (i) the feeling of self-consciousness before another's gaze, (ii) the special form of interpersonal connection constitutive of eye contact and (iii) the form of mutual openness involved in joint attention cannot be understood either as being reducible to the ontologically antecedent psychological states of each individual (as suggested by 'The Reductive Approach'), nor in terms of an irreducible second person relation (as suggested by 'The Second Person Approach'). Instead, I outline and defend a 'Transactional Approach' according to which, when I feel self-conscious before another's gaze I am conscious of myself as being acted upon by the other through their gaze (Chapter One). This provides the basis for an account of eye contact as a 'mutual transaction' (Chapter Two) and an account of joint attention (Chapter Three). This account of joint attention, in turn, provides a basis for understanding the Aristotelian idea that human social life is distinctive in the way it is characterised by a special form of co-consciousness. In Part Two, this approach is developed to provide an account of humiliation (Chapter Four) and shame (Chapter Five). These emotions tend to be understood in terms of The Reductive Approach. However, in each instance I argue that The Reductive Approach faces serious difficulties in making sense of them and their proper place in human social life. The Transactional Approach, on the other hand, is shown to have the resources to provide a more plausible account of these emotions.

## Impact Statement

University College London requires that each thesis include an 'Impact Statement' which describes how 'the expertise, knowledge, analysis, discovery or insight presented in this thesis could be put to beneficial use'.

My most general aim in this thesis is to provide an elucidation of a form of intersubjective relation which is essential to our nature as self-conscious social animals and which has not been satisfactorily recognised in much contemporary writing in philosophy and psychology. Acknowledging this form of relation opens up a vista of new and illuminating ways of thinking about human intersubjective life. Some of these new ways of thinking about intersubjectivity are described in this thesis; others will be explored in future work on love, friendship and our consciousness of other minds. In this thesis, I seek to reappropriate insights from the philosophical tradition, from thinkers such as Aristotle, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone Weil, to enrich contemporary debates about interpersonal self-consciousness. The chapters on ordinary self-consciousness, eye contact and humiliation deal with topics that are largely neglected in the philosophical literature; and it is my hope that the chapters on shame and joint attention, though they address topics on which a great deal is and is continuing to be written, nevertheless approach these topics in a sufficiently distinctive way to be of interest.

Though this thesis is written for an academic audience, it addresses puzzles which can emerge naturally through ordinary reflection on human social life; puzzles which I have found many to puzzle over in some shape or form. I have tried, as far as possible, to stay true to the natural appeal of these puzzles, and would therefore hope that this material would be of interest, and therefore of use, to anyone who is interested in understanding these aspects of their life more extensively. The accounts of shame and humiliation provided in Part Two might, in addition, have implications for discussions about the place of these emotions in human public life (issues raised by Margalit 1997 and Nussbaum 2004, among others).

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A hundred times I have walked in public places and on the busiest thoroughfares with the sole object of learning to put up with these cruel looks; not only was I unable to do so, I did not even make any progress and all my painful and fruitless efforts left me just as vulnerable as before to being upset, hurt or exasperated. (Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, p. 132)

It is a very true and expressive phrase, "He looked daggers at me" for the first pattern and prototype of all daggers must have been a glance of the eye. First there was the glance of Jove's eye, then his fiery bolt, then, the material gradually hardening, tridents, spears, javelins, and finally, for the convenience of private men, daggers, krisses, and so forth...It is wonderful how we get about the streets without being wounded by these delicate and glancing weapons. (Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, p. 52)

# Introduction (1)

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[The virtuous man's] existence was seen to be desirable because he perceived his own goodness, and such perception is pleasant in itself. He needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friend as well, and it will be realized in their living together and sharing in discussion and thought; for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b10-13)

It became customary to gather in front of the Huts or around a large Tree: song and dance, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle men and women gathered together. Everyone began to look at everyone else and to wish to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a price. The one who sang or danced best; the handsomest, the strongest, the most skilful, or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded, and this was the first step at once toward inequality and vice: from these first preferences arose vanity and contempt on the one hand, shame and envy on the other; and the fermentation caused compounds fatal to happiness and innocence. (Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Part II, §16, pp. 169-170)

## §1. Interpersonal self-consciousness

This thesis is about interpersonal self-consciousness, the form of consciousness each of us has of ourselves, as ourselves, insofar as we figure as the object of another person's awareness.<sup>1</sup> Interpersonal self-consciousness is a ubiquitous feature of human life, typically present whenever I become aware of another human being. When I become aware of another person, they are typically experienced not merely as another centre of consciousness of the world, but as a self-conscious subject, the kind of thing that can be conscious both of themselves and, potentially, of me.

The ubiquity of interpersonal self-consciousness is a reflection of our nature as social animals, animals which seek to live a life in common with others of their kind, to engage in co-operative activity for the sake of shared goals, most generally those which relate to mutual survival and reproduction. Human social life, however, is distinctive in the way that it is infused with interpersonal self-consciousness. We pursue states of interpersonal self-consciousness, through eye contact, joint attention and conversation, for the pleasure we take in being self-consciously connected with others in these ways, rather than merely for the merely strategic ends

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'interpersonal self-consciousness' is borrowed from Peacocke (2014).



they are instrumental for achieving. This is a familiar theme from the work of Michael Tomasello, who has described human beings as ‘the ultra-social animal’ (see Tomasello 2014b). Tomasello argues that certain forms of interpersonal self-consciousness (in his vocabulary, states of ‘joint intentionality’) are present in humans in a distinctive way and to a much greater extent than they are in other animals. This is central to Tomasello’s explanation of the unique forms of communication and cognition displayed by human beings.<sup>2</sup>

From infancy onwards humans seek out states of interpersonal connection, first by engaging in eye contact and joint attention with a caregiver, and later, through conversation and forms of joint attention and joint activity more sophisticated than those that are present during infancy, such as watching films and shows together, taking trips together, singing songs together, engaging in joint reminiscence, and so forth. As Carpenter & Liebel (2011, pp. 175-6) observe, the strength of our motives to engage in these forms of joint intentionality is reflected in the costs we are willing to bear to engage in them. We choose to act jointly with others in some task even when this means sharing the reward or incurring a cost to secure their participation (for example, in having to pay for their cinema ticket).

Human life, then, is characteristically a form of life *with* others in the sense that it is permeated with interpersonal self-consciousness. This is reflected, in different ways, in the two epigraphs to this introduction. In the first epigraph, Aristotle observes that human life is a distinctive form of shared life in that it is a life of shared thought and conversation. A good human life, therefore, will be one that involves these forms of interpersonal connection, of the right kind, to the right degree and with the right kind of frequency, whereas a life utterly devoid of them will thereby be a deprived life (in one respect, at least). In the second epigraph, Rousseau, a philosopher much more ambivalent about our social nature than Aristotle, observes that as human beings began living together in groups, they gradually became concerned with the ways in which they are seen by others, coming to desire recognition, esteem and respect, and thereby developing a susceptibility to pride and vanity on the one hand, and shame, embarrassment and humiliation on the other. For Rousseau, this is the source of all human vice and is fatal to the innocent happiness characteristic of the solitary life of man, as he described it. Their diverging sentiments to one side, however, these observations of Aristotle and Rousseau fit together nicely. It is in virtue of the act that human life is a shared life with others, one which is characterised by a certain sort of shared thought, conversation and perception, that we want others to see us as we see ourselves, sharing our conception of who we are and of our value.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Tomasello (2014a) and (2019) for synoptic studies.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Rousseau would disagree with this. His views on human sociality are, because of their profound ambivalence, difficult to determine. Useful discussions and defences of Rousseau have been provided by Dent (1989) and Neuhouser (2008).

The human need for interpersonal connection is undeniably bound with our need to co-operate. As Aristotle observes in the *Politics*, an individual ‘when isolated, is not self-sufficing...he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient to himself, must be either a beast or a god’ (*Politics* 1535a, 25-30). We are dependent on others, and therefore our desires to engage in states of joint intentionality and joint action are a necessary means to our survival and reproduction. However we should resist the thought that we seek to engage in these forms of interpersonal contact only insofar as they are instrumental to our survival and reproduction. This view, as implausible as it is on the face of it, is not without its proponents. Though not stated outright, it seems to be implied by Hobbes in the following paragraph:

*Instrumental* are those powers, which...are means and instruments to acquire more [power]: as riches, reputation, friends, and the secret working of God, which man call good luck...to have servants, is power; to have friends, is power: for they are strengths united. (Hobbes 1994, p. 74).

It is no doubt correct that we need to co-operate for instrumental reasons, and that the possession of friends, servants and allies has instrumental value. But it is a mistake to suggest that our need for co-operation is exclusively instrumental. An alternative conception is provided by Leibniz, who observes that:

[Hobbes] did not take into account that the best of men, free from all wickedness, would join together the better to accomplish their [aim], just as birds flock together the better to travel on company. (*New Essays*, III.i.1, cited in Wiggins 2006 p. 229)

We need to collaborate, and to share in thought, conversation and perception, not merely for instrumental reasons, for survival and reproduction, but because the very life we seek to live is itself an inherently shared, collaborative one — a life characterised by these states of shared consciousness and activity, along with the distinctively human pleasures and pains that they afford.

If this is right, then arriving at an adequate understanding of interpersonal self-consciousness and the forms of interpersonal contact it enables is central to understanding our special nature as self-conscious social animals.

## §2. The aims of this thesis

I have two general aims in this thesis: one critical, one constructive. The first is to argue that a widespread way of thinking about interpersonal self-consciousness, which I call ‘The Reductive Approach’, is unsatisfactory. The second is to explain what a non-reductive approach must look like if it is to constitute a satisfactory alternative. This constructive aim also has a critical aspect in that it proceeds through a critique of the main non-reductive approach present in the contemporary literature. This is ‘The Second Person Approach’, which I argue is in important respects incomplete and must therefore be seen as depending on ‘The Transactional Approach’ which I will introduce and develop throughout this thesis.

In §3, I will provide a chapter by chapter outline of the contents of this thesis. Before doing so, however, it is worth introducing and describing these different existing approaches in more depth. The Transactional Approach will be presented later, through a consideration of the limitations of each of these approaches throughout the first three chapters of this thesis.

### 2.1 *The Reductive Approach*

The most common way of understanding interpersonal self-consciousness and the forms of interpersonal relation that it involves is reductive. A relation of this sort — whether it be the relation of being looked at by someone, engaging in eye contact or joint attention with them, or feeling ashamed before them — is understood as reducing to the psychological states of each subject; or, more specifically, to those psychological states of each subject which do not themselves constitutively depend on some irreducible intersubjective relation holding between these subjects (I will call such states ‘the ontologically antecedent’ psychological states of each subject<sup>4</sup>).

Examples of The Reductive Approach abound. Nagel (1969), for example, seeks to explain the special form of mutual awareness present in mutual looking and non-perverted sexual desire in terms of the independently specifiable psychological states of each subject. This approach was inspired by Grice’s (1957) reductive account of speaker-meaning. The best general statement of this position, however, has been provided by Peacocke (2014).<sup>5</sup>

Peacocke illustrates the basic form of interpersonal self-consciousness with the following example. Imagine a soldier on patrol in Afghanistan,

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term ‘state’ out of convenience, without intending to restrict my claims to states as opposed to occurrences such as events or processes.

<sup>5</sup> The prevalence of this model is perhaps partly due to the fact that the classical notion of analysis is reductive in the sense that seeks to provide a non-circular analysis of a concept in terms simpler concepts that are better understood. As Strawson (1971, p. 172) observes, ‘the classical method of analysis is that in terms of which, in our tradition, we most naturally think’; though, as he also stresses, this method is not mandatory.

navigating a mountain pass as quietly as she can so as to avoid detection by the enemy. Squeezing through a narrow rock formation when, emerging on the other side, she hears the clicking of a rifle: she freezes in recognition that she has alerted the enemy. In particular, she is conscious that she is the object of someone else's conscious awareness. As described, the soldier is in a state of interpersonal self-consciousness. This consciousness can take several forms.

First interpersonal self-consciousness, as Peacocke understands it, admits of at least three degrees of richness: the soldier might be conscious of herself as the object of another's awareness, as being viewed by the other either as (1) a physical object, (2) a conscious subject, or (3) a self-conscious subject. This third degree of richness is what Peacocke (2014, p. 239) calls 'ascriptive interpersonal self-consciousness'.

Second, we can become interpersonally self-conscious by thinking about another's thoughts, perceptions or imaginations of which we are the object, as well as by perceiving or imagining their thoughts, perceptions and imaginations of us.

Third, the example of the soldier describes an asymmetrical situation in the sense that the soldier is aware that she figures as the object of another's awareness, though the enemy is not yet aware of her as being aware of them in a similar way. If the enemy became aware that they figure as the object of the soldier's awareness, and both the soldier and the enemy became aware of one another's state of interpersonal self-consciousness, then the situation would become a symmetrical one in which each subject is interpersonally self-conscious relative to the other. The form of interpersonal self-consciousness in the symmetrical situation, according to Peacocke, is the same in kind as that which occurs in the asymmetrical situation, though these states differ in content insofar as the symmetrical situation involves each subject being aware of additional iterations of interpersonal awareness. The Reductive Approach, as we will see in Chapters Two and Three, seeks to understand the mutual awareness characteristic of eye contact and joint attention in terms of this kind of symmetrical situation.

Reductive explanations, when successful, have a great deal of appeal, enabling us to understand puzzling phenomena on the basis of more basic phenomena that are arguably better understood. The Reductive Approach seeks to understand puzzling forms of interpersonal self-consciousness in terms of more basic psychological states such as beliefs, desires, imaginations and perceptions, all of which must be appealed to independently of this topic in order to explain the nature of the mind and its relation to the world. Though the explanations which result are often complex, they aim to be ontologically parsimonious and explanatorily powerful.

This way of thinking about interpersonal self-consciousness comes naturally if we think that our basic form of awareness of others as self-conscious 'minded' subjects consists in our awareness of their ontologically-

antecedent mental states. This is an assumption shared by both of the main positions in the so-called ‘theory of mind’ debate. If we think our understanding of others is the product of an innate ‘theory of mind’, then it is natural to understand interpersonal self-consciousness as consisting in a form of second-order theorising: theorising about another’s theorising about us. If, by contrast, we think our understanding of other minds is based in a kind of simulation: then we will be simulating another’s simulation of us (see Peacocke 2014, p. 253). Finally, for those who think that our basic awareness of other minds is ‘perceptual’, the most basic form of interpersonal self-consciousness might consist in our perception of another’s perception of us.<sup>6</sup>

On Peacocke’s account, the intentional contents of states of interpersonal self-consciousness can be specified entirely in terms of first person and third personal contents. Indeed, he argues that on this basis, we can provide a reductive explanation of our use of the second person pronoun without appealing to distinctively second personal thoughts. Peacocke’s reluctance to acknowledge second person thoughts has received opposition from a number of quarters. Some philosophers who disagree with Peacocke on this point argue that a proper understanding of the notion of second person (‘I-You’ or ‘I-Thou’) thought requires a rejection of The Reductive Approach (this position will be discussed in §2.2). For now, however, it is important to note that some philosophers have rejected Peacocke’s view about second person thought without questioning his more general framework of interpersonal self-consciousness. Indeed, though Peacocke rejects the notion of a distinctive form of second person thought, it is unclear exactly how to formulate his view given that he himself employs the second person pronoun in his account of interpersonal self-consciousness. Heal (2014) and Salje (2017) both question his argument on these grounds without questioning his account of interpersonal self-consciousness more generally. Salje, for example, argues that there is a distinctive second person concept from within a Peacockian framework. On her view, you-talk tracks you-thought. So the conditions of appropriateness of a second person utterance will correspond to circumstances in which we can think a second person thought. As she notes:

In sincere and successful uses of the second-person pronoun I am aware that I feature, myself, in your consciousness as a conscious subject, because I am aware that you are aware of me being aware of you. My use of the second-person pronoun signals my interpersonal self-consciousness with respect to you. (Salje 2017, p. 826)

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<sup>6</sup> For theory-theory see see Baron-Cohen (1995), and Gopnik & Wellman (1992). For simulation theory, see Gordon (1986) and Heal (1998). For the idea that we can perceive other minds, see McDowell (1998d), Cassam (2007 Ch. 5), Green (2007), Stout (2010), McNeill (2012) and Smith (2010). Ratcliffe (2007, Ch. 5) argues that implicit simulation is a form of perception. This form of awareness is also present in Husserl’s (1960) account of empathy.

A distinctive form of second person thought, on this view, is enabled by the kind of symmetrical interpersonal self-consciousness described by Peacocke. The second person concept, as it is understood by Salje, can nevertheless figure in the contents of the kind of ontologically antecedent mental state that is the focus of The Reductive Approach. According to Salje, to think a second person thought one must address the other, though the notion of address as she understands it is not restricted to linguistic address. Rather, it is something we might do by squeezing someone's hand or tapping on their bedroom wall. Salje characterises the act of address as follows:

Addressing: To address someone is to act with an intention to bring it about that (i) they notice (or sustain notice of) one's attention directed towards them, and (ii) they do so partly in virtue of recognizing that very intention. (Salje 2017, p. 832)<sup>7</sup>

With this notion of address in place, we have an account of the second person thought on which it refers 'to the person one is both attending to and intending that they notice one is attending to (in virtue of recognizing that very intention)' (Salje 2017, p. 833).

If this is correct, then The Reductive Approach has the resources to acknowledge a form of second person thought since, though this thought depends on a form of interpersonal interaction, it can be explained entirely in terms of the ontologically antecedent mental states of each subject.

Much recent work in the theory of mind debate which is presented as a rejection of the so-called 'contemplative' standpoints described by the theory-theory and simulation-theory passes under the general heading of a 'second person approach'. A hallmark of this approach has been its emphasis on the idea that infants' knowledge of other minds emerges through interaction, where these positions are, in certain respects, contemplative, rather than theorising or engaging in simulation.<sup>8</sup> As Dullstein (2014) points out, the potential contribution of this line of thought to research on the development of interpersonal understanding remains unclear, largely owing to a lack of clarity concerning the notions of 'second personal engagement' and 'social interaction' employed by these

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<sup>7</sup> One source of dispute between Salje and those she calls 'anti-distinctivists' (e.g. Longworth 2013, Rödl 2007 and Thompson 2012a, 2012b) will concern how to understand the act of address. It is important, in this regard, that Salje specifies 'addressing' as an outsider to the relation, that is in third personal terms rather than 'I' and 'You' since the latter option would directly expose her position to the arguments of Rödl (2007) and Haddock (2014). The dispute between these different ways of understanding the notion of second person thought will turn in large part on whether this understanding of address is satisfactory. A full exploration of this topic, however, must be reserved for another occasion.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, e.g., Gallagher (2001), Hobson (2002), Ratcliffe (2007), Reddy (2008), Schilbach et al. (2013) and Tomasello (2014a).

accounts. For present purposes, it is unclear that the emphasis these accounts place on embodied social interaction, is, in and of itself, incompatible with The Reductive Approach. After all, it is open for The Reductive Approach to describe these ‘relations’ or ‘interactions’ in terms of the embodied acts and psychological states of each individual. For all that is said by these authors, there is nothing to preclude a reductive version of the second person approach to the theory of mind debate.<sup>9</sup>

For example, Reddy (2008, Ch. 3, esp. pp. 26-27) outlines a second person approach to interpersonal understanding. Her view has three core claims. First, it rejects the dualist assumption that minds are opaque to perception — ‘It sees minds as transparent within (and within the limits of) active, emotionally engaged perception’ (ibid. p. 26). Second, ‘it pluralises the other, rejecting the assumption of singularity in the way we sometimes talk of other minds — of “*the other*”’ (ibid.). In particular, we can relate with at least ‘two kinds’ of other: ‘others whom we relate to in the second person, addressing hem (and being addressed by them) as a You, and others whom we relate to in the third person, talking about them (or being talked about by them) as He or She’ (ibid.p. 27). Third, ‘it sees this active emotional engagement between people as constituting — or creating — the minds that each comes to have and develop, not merely providing information about each to the other’ (ibid.).

Very little in the preceding paragraph is obviously inconsistent with The Reductive Approach. Whether or not it is consistent with The Reductive Approach will depend on how the notion of the mutual ‘constitution’ of each subject’s mind out of interaction is understood. If this is simply the developmental claim that psychological development essentially involves interaction with others then this can be acknowledged by The Reductive Approach.

This tangent on second person thought and ‘the second person approach’ to interpersonal understanding is important for two reasons. First, it enables us to recognise that The Reductive Approach can take many forms and can therefore accommodate much of what is insightful in recent discussions of ‘the second person’, being compatible both with Salje’s account of second person thought and much of what is substantive in the

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Tomasello’s employment of the notion of ‘second personal engagement’ in the following paragraph is compatible with the reductive approach:

Second-personal engagement has two minimal characteristics: (1) the individual is directly participating in, not observing from outside, the social interaction; and (2) the interaction is with a specific other individual with whom there is a dyadic relationship, not with something more general like a group (if there are multiple persons present, there are many dyadic relationships but no sense of group). There is less consensus about other possible features of second-personal engagement, but Darwall (2006) proposes, in addition, that (3) the essence of this kind of engagement is "mutual recognition" in which each partner gives the other, and expects from the other, a certain amount of respect as an equal individual — a fundamentally cooperative attitude among partners (Tomasello 2014a, p. 48; see also p. 87).

second person approach to the theory of mind debate. Second, being clear about this is helpful insofar as it enables us to distinguish a more radical appeal to the notion of second person thought and awareness, one which does require the rejection of The Reductive Approach as a general account of interpersonal self-consciousness.

## 2.2. *The Second Person Approach*

In recent years a number of philosophers have argued that when two subjects engage in certain forms of face to face interaction and are therefore able to address one another with the second person pronoun, they thereby stand in a special form of cognitive or experiential relation which cannot be reduced to the ontologically antecedent states of each subject.

According to Peacocke, when two subjects engage in such face to face interactions, each subject can be understood as being interpersonally self-conscious with respect to the other. On this view, as I mentioned above, the form of each subject's awareness in a symmetrical situation of this sort will be the same in kind as the form of interpersonal self-consciousness each subject might have in an asymmetrical situation.

According to the more radical alternative I have in mind, by contrast, we cannot understand the intersubjective relation these two subjects stand in in terms of their ontologically antecedent psychological states. Rather, this relation is to be understood as a primitive *bipolar* one: a fundamentally relational experience or thought that is shared between two subjects. Each subject can said to be in a certain psychological state in virtue of standing in this relation, but this psychological state will not be of the 'ontologically antecedent' sort since it constitutively depends on the second person relation which holds between them both.

This kind of position has been defended as an account of second-person thought in subtly different ways by Rödl (2007; 2014), Thompson (2012a; 2012b) and Longworth (2013; 2014). Suppose I shout to you: 'you've got egg in your hair'. For you to understand this thought, you must entertain the thought: 'I have egg in my hair'. These philosophers seek to offer a straightforward account of the relation between these thoughts. Rather than treating these thoughts as distinct, as they must be according to Peacocke or Salje, and providing an explanation of how they are related, these authors suggest that the relation between my I-thought and your you-thought is one of identity. There is a single second person thought, or I-You thought, with two subject-slots, which I express with the second person pronoun and you express with the first person pronoun (see Thompson 2012a, pp. 239-40).

In a number of papers, Eilan suggests that we can view the relation two subjects stand in during episodes of face to face interaction and joint attention similarly. Just as the success of my act of telling you is subject to a first-person pickup requirement, so too is the form of relation we each stand in during episodes of eye contact:



A recurring underlying intuition...is that when we stand in second person relations to each other, the other's first person perspective is in some way immediately present to us, in a way that is not captured by appeal to a combination of first person ways of thinking of oneself and third person ways of thinking of the other. I suggest that one way of beginning to articulate the idea is to note that the 'first-person pickup requirement' that holds for the communication of thoughts expressed using the second person also holds for a wide variety of activities or experiences which have what is sometimes referred to as a 'bi-polar' or 'I-you' or 'one towards the other' structure. Examples are A ordering B to do something or A telling B something. For such activities to succeed 'by their own lights', there must be first person uptake by B, accompanied by a reciprocal attitude to A, which would be expressed using 'you'. The radical line I think we need to take if the idea of primitive you-awareness is to so much as get off the ground is to say that the way A is aware of B in such cases constitutively depends on B meeting the first-person pickup requirement. (Eilan 2016, p. 322)

On this view, each subject is only able to take a second person perspective on the other if the other is likewise taking a second person perspective on them. When these conditions obtain, Eilan argues, A and B will stand in an irreducible second person relation with one another. Like Peacocke's approach, Eilan's account is programmatic and is best considered, not in the abstract, but insofar as it applies to specific forms of interpersonal self-consciousness. A more extensive presentation of this account will therefore be provided later in relation to eye contact and joint attention.

### §3 Outline

In Part One of this thesis, I will argue that The Reductive Approach is unable to provide a satisfactory account of the experience of feeling self-conscious before another's gaze, or the experience of being the object of another's gaze more generally (Chapter One), the special form of interpersonal contact characteristic of eye contact (Chapter Two), and the form of mutual awareness characteristic of joint attention (Chapter Three). Nor, I argue, can these experiences be understood in terms of The Second Person Approach. This approach is shown to be unsuitable in the case of ordinary self-consciousness insofar as the notion of a second person relation is defined as being one which involves a kind of 'mutual awareness' that ordinary self-consciousness lacks. Though The Second Person Approach has greater potential as an account of eye contact and joint attention than as an account of ordinary self-consciousness, I argue that it

also fails to properly account for the basic, non-linguistic, form of mutual awareness these experiences involve.

In each of these chapters I argue that these difficulties can be avoided by ‘The Transactional Approach’. In Chapter One I argue that when I experience myself as being looked at by another, I experience myself as being *acted upon* by the other through their gaze, and that therefore we are related as *patient* and *agent* respectively. I suggest, drawing on Anscombe (2001), that what I experience the other as *doing to me* and what I experience myself as thereby *undergoing* are two aspects of an irreducible relation. I call this kind of relation, adopting a term introduced by Ford (2014), an ‘interpersonal transaction’. In Chapter Two, this account is developed so as to provide an account of eye contact, which I argue is to be understood as a ‘mutual transaction’ in which each subject both acts upon the other and is acted upon by them in a single transaction. Then, in Chapter Three, I provide an account of joint attention on this basis, which I treat as ‘the prototypical sharing situation’.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, provides a basis for an elucidation of the Aristotelian idea that human life is a distinctive kind of social life which is characterised by a special form of shared thought and perception.

In Part Two, I consider whether The Reductive Approach can provide a satisfactory account of some forms of interpersonal self-consciousness which play an important role in human ethical life. In this domain it is also true that the main source of opposition to The Reductive Approach focuses on phenomena that are mutual (e.g. Thompson 2004; Julius 2016). This opposition to The Reductive Approach is incomplete, in my view, since it leaves unquestioned The Reductive Approach’s account of non-mutual, ethically significant forms of interpersonal self-consciousness such as those that are involved in our experiences of shame and humiliation. Though The Reductive Approach appears to be the ‘default view’ of these forms of interpersonal self-consciousness, I argue that it faces serious difficulties in making proper sense of them.

In Chapter Four, I argue that The Reductive Approach makes puzzling the pre-theoretically plausible idea that being humiliated is a way of being harmed. In a similar vein, in Chapter Five I argue that The Reductive Approach is unable to provide a plausible account of the phenomenological structure of shame. Beginning from the idea that shame manifests a concern both with (a) one’s awareness of how one is, particularly in relation to some evaluative standard, and (b) one’s awareness of how one appears to others, I argue that The Reductive Approach finds itself caught in an oscillation between two unsatisfactory positions. It either privileges (a) and is thereby unable to do proper justice to (b) (e.g. Taylor 1985); or it privileges (b) and is unable to do proper justice to (a) (e.g. Calhoun 2004).

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Werner and Kaplan (1963, p. 44)

These difficulties can seem inescapable if the only alternative to The Reductive Approach is The Second Person Approach. After all, shame and humiliation, like ordinary self-consciousness, do not seem to involve the relevant kind of mutual awareness that is definitive of the second person relation. A suitably developed version of The Transactional Approach, however, will be shown to possess the resources to provide a more satisfactory account of these emotions and their proper place in human social life.

Before turning to these issues, I would like to make two points about the content and organisation of this thesis.

The first is that each chapter was originally written as a stand-alone paper and though, in their current presentation, they cannot be read independently, I have chosen to retain something of the ‘stand-alone paper’ structure. This is most visible in Part One, where each chapter ‘starts afresh’ with a new puzzle and a new critique of both The Reductive Approach and The Second Person Approach. I think this makes it easier to see how these puzzles are related and emerge as a result of a common oversight. It is my hope that, as a result of this, the whole will have an argumentative force that is even greater than that of each of the chapters that make it up.

The second is that I focus, by and large, on ‘negative’ experiences. This is true most clearly with regard to Part Two, where I focus on humiliation rather than recognition, and shame rather than pride; it is true also, to some extent, with regard to ordinary self-consciousness, though I think this is much less straightforwardly characterisable as a ‘negative experience’. One reason in favour of this approach is that it stays true to the way in which many of these philosophical issues disclose themselves in ordinary social life. When all is going well, when we are immersed in our interactions with others, we are much less liable to take a stand back and reflect on them. We are much more prone to do so, however, when things go wrong. When we are humiliated or ashamed before another’s gaze, or when the other’s gaze makes us feel deeply self-conscious, we naturally find ourselves wondering how another could have this kind of power over us and whether it is good for us to be this way. Another reason in favour of this approach is that, when it comes to the topics of Part Two, the negative experiences are much easier to get a hold on than the positive ones. Shame, for example, can be opposed to a kind of pride, but we seem to use the word ‘pride’ to a much greater diversity of phenomena than the word shame. When one speaks of ‘feeling proud of oneself’ one seems to speak of an emotion opposed to ‘feeling ashamed of oneself’. But we also speak of people who ‘have their pride’, where this describes someone who accepts a high social status as their due. Such a person can be contrasted with someone who feels proud (in the first sense) of their high social status because they see themselves as having earned it (this distinction is drawn by Taylor 1985, Ch. 2). This is not to mention the phenomena of *hubris* and ‘human pride’. Similarly, we might oppose ‘being humiliated’ with ‘being recognised’. Recognition, however,

comes in many forms, and the most straightforward way of identifying a specific form of recognition and specifying its value is in terms of a case in which it is absent or undermined — being subject to humiliation being one such kind of case.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This point is well made by Margalit (1997, p. 5)

## **Part One**

## 1

# Ordinary Self-Consciousness as Philosophical Problem

We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives; the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.) One can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ear or nose. When you see the eye you see something going out from it. You see the look in the eye. (Wittgenstein, *Zettel* §220)

## §1. Two senses of 'self-conscious'

In 'The First Person', Anscombe (1981a, p. 25) distinguishes two senses of 'self-conscious'. First came the philosophical notion, which arose in seventeenth century philosophy, and which refers to the special form of consciousness one has of oneself, *as oneself*, as opposed to the variety of ways in which one can figure in the mind of another. Gradually, this term entered ordinary usage in an altered form, which Anscombe describes as roughly meaning: 'the awkwardness from being troubled by the feeling of being an object of observation by other people.' This is the ordinary notion, which we employ when we speak of 'feeling self-conscious' and which will be the topic of this paper.

Anscombe suggests that the ordinary notion is 'pretty irrelevant' to the philosophical notion. Unsurprisingly, given this verdict, the ordinary notion has received little further consideration (with the notable exception of a recent paper by O'Brien — see O'Brien 2011). Though it will be the burden of this chapter to show that this neglect is unfortunate, I think it is understandable nevertheless. Why, one might fairly ask, are we in need of a philosophical theory of self-consciousness? Even if we acknowledge that it is an interesting and distinctive feature of our nature as self-conscious social animals, we might still wonder where there is anything about it that calls for *philosophical* investigation in particular. What does a philosopher have to offer from the armchair which could not be said with greater authority by a psychologist or an anthropologist? To such worries it can be tempting to reply that for the psychologist to so much as address this topic, they must begin from a preliminary grasp of ordinary self-consciousness, from a description of what it is, and that this, furthermore, is something that the philosopher is well-placed to provide. But, if my own experience is anything to go by, it can be hard not to empathise with the sceptic to some extent. What, if anything, is philosophically deep or interesting about something

can seem so unproblematic, so commonplace, so seemingly distant from the great questions of philosophy? Is there anything puzzling about our preliminary grasp of ordinary self-consciousness?

I think there is. In this paper, I hope to show that ordinary self-consciousness *does* call for philosophical reflection and that in answering this call we are led to acknowledge an aspect of our being-for-others that is often overlooked in recent treatments of interpersonal self-consciousness. My argument is as follows. I begin with a description of ordinary self-consciousness, which emphasises the idea that it constitutes a *sui generis* form of disruption to the subject's activity (§2). The relation of feeling self-conscious before another, I argue, cannot be explained either, reductively, in terms of the ontologically antecedent states of each subject, or in terms of an irreducible second personal relation (§3). To understand how it is so much as possible, I argue, we must acknowledge the Sartrean claim that when I experience the gaze of another I thereby experience them as *acting upon me* (§4).

### 2.1 'Ordinary' and 'philosophical' self-consciousness: their relation.

When we describe someone as feeling self-conscious, we describe them as undergoing a kind of experience in which they are conscious of themselves *as themselves*. Any manifestation of ordinary self-consciousness will therefore be a manifestation of self-consciousness in its philosophical sense. The ordinary notion is specifically different from the philosophical notion in that it involves being affected by another in a particular way. As a basis for further discussion, consider a scene from Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* in which Lucy introduces her fiancé Stephen to Maggie, the protagonist of the novel:

Stephen became quite brilliant in an account of Buckland's treatise, which he had just been reading. He was rewarded by seeing Maggie let her work fall and gradually get so absorbed in his wonderful geological story that she sat looking at him, leaning forward with crossed arms and with an entire absence of self-consciousness, as if he had been the snuffiest of old professors and she a downy-lipped alumnus. He was so fascinated by this clear, large gaze that at last he forgot to look away from it occasionally towards Lucy: but she, sweet child, as only rejoicing that Stephen was proving to Maggie how clever he was, and that they would certainly be good friends after all. 'I will bring you the book, shall I, Miss Tulliver?' said Stephen, when he found the stream of his recollections running rather shallow. 'There are many illustrations in it that you will like to see.' 'Oh thank you,' said Maggie, blushing with returning self-consciousness at this direct address, and taking up her work again. (Eliot 2003a, p. 396)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to O'Brien (2011) for this example.

First, we might paraphrase Sartre (2018, p. 309) and say that to be self-conscious is to be conscious of *oneself* before *another*. When I feel self-conscious I'm conscious of myself as the actual or potential object of another's attention, and I therefore experience them as actively oriented around me in some way. Maggie, for example, is acutely aware of herself as the object of Stephen's attention. But I might also experience another as attending to me insofar as they are actively and attentively ignoring me. In *Middlemarch*, Mr Farebrother notices, with characteristic astuteness, that though Rosamund did not once look towards her husband Dr Lydgate during the dinner-party, she was nevertheless 'intensely aware of Lydgate's voice and movements', and 'her pretty good-tempered air of unconsciousness, in reality, was a 'studied negation' (Eliot 2003b, p. 642). It is natural to imagine that this isn't something which requires a laboured inference. Rather, it's plausible that it is visible in Rosamund's face and overall manner, at least to a suitably attuned observer like Farebrother. We can also imagine that, if Lydgate were to notice this, he would apprehend it in a way importantly different to the way it is apprehended by Farebrother, since he is, after all, the object of this 'studied negation'. This in turn might make him feel self-conscious.

## 2.2 *Self-conscious social anxiety*

In feeling self-conscious, I experience another's gaze as a source of a special kind of disruption to my immersed activity. This is central to the feeling of self-consciousness and is highlighted in the example above, which begins with Maggie's absorption in Stephen's speech. Consider the metaphorical force of the term 'absorption' as described by Ryle (1954, p. 143). As the blotting paper absorbs the ink, thirstily imbibing every last drop of it, so Maggie's attention is sucked up by Stephen's geological story, which becomes, 'for the moment, [her] whole world.' When one person becomes absorbed in another in this kind of way this can constitute a kind of intimacy, something which draws them both together. But when Stephen seeks to reinitiate dialogue, and Maggie's attention moves from his speech to his attention on her, she feels a 'returning self-consciousness'. This disrupts her absorption in his speech and constitutes an obstacle to her reconnecting with him in dialogue. She blushes and looks away, and in order to shield herself from his attention she tries to absorb herself in her knitting. But this too is disrupted by her acute awareness of Stephen's attention.

Consider a different example. I am reading alone in the kitchen, when my flatmate's new boyfriend enters to make a cup of tea. After the initial stream of smalltalk runs dry, we both make a concerted effort to focus on our respective activities, though we occasionally cast one another the odd self-conscious eye. My self-consciousness, in this instance, inhibits *both* my ability to fluidly, and naturally, interact with them, and also my ability to immerse myself in the paper that I was reading. My attention is caught in



uncomfortable suspense: it is drawn in by the other's attention, but thanks to my self-consciousness I cannot absorb myself in an interaction with them, and yet their attending to me prevents me from becoming absorbed in anything else.

If this is correct, then though we might follow O'Brien (2011, p. 102) in distinguishing *acting* self-consciously — i.e. the behaviour characteristic of ordinary self-consciousness — from the *feeling* of self-consciousness, we should be careful not to exaggerate this distinction. The feeling of self-consciousness is, after all, an embodied one in the sense that what it is like to feel self-conscious is, on the face of it, inextricably tied with one's body feeling to be a particular way. Before the other arrived on the scene, I held my posture unselfconsciously. But now I find myself actively and self-consciously maintaining my posture so as to appear nonchalant. Scheler (1987, p. 25) says of the embarrassed person, 'he does not know where to put his hands and feet; he feels himself handicapped while talking and acting.' Part of what it is to *feel* self-conscious is for one's body, and one's activity, to feel different. Consider two further observations.

First, before my housemate's boyfriend entered the kitchen, I held my posture instinctively. But now I'm aware he is looking at me, my holding a certain kind of posture becomes something I must do intentionally, so as to appear natural. Similarly, Scheler (1987, p. 25) writes of the embarrassed person that 'he does not know where to put his hands and feet; he feels himself handicapped while talking and acting'.

Second, another's gaze can alter the inner character of my activity, even if this results in no visible change to an outside observer. Suppose I succeed in looking nonchalant as I enter a full lecture hall during a talk. My bodily activity, in this case the manner in which I walk, though it might be outwardly indiscriminable from the way I walk when I'm not watched, nevertheless *feels* different, and it *is* different insofar as it is done with effort against the pressure of another's gaze. Sometimes I might feel as if I'm simply mimicking the behaviour of a relaxed person, rather than 'acting naturally'. This might be what Simone Weil had in mind when she observed that 'no one stands up, or moves about, or sits down again in quite the same fashion when he is alone in a room as when he has a visitor' (Weil 2005, 187).<sup>2</sup>

When I am absorbed in a conversation with someone I'm comfortable with, I don't have to think about *how* to respond or comport myself. I

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<sup>2</sup> Something this seems to be behind Barthes (2000, p. 10) observation in the following paragraph:

[V]ery often (too often, to my taste) I have been photographed and knew it. Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image"

Though this is complicated in that one is conscious of oneself, not merely before another's gaze but also before the camera.

immediately grasp each stage of the interaction as calling for some kinds of response rather than others and I respond unselfconsciously. If we are having a conversation about a difficult topic in philosophy, the kind of conversation which involves periods of pensive silence in which a thought is carefully formulated, this can be described in terms of 'one's not knowing how to respond', but it is of an importantly different order. In a conversation of this sort, one might apprehend the possibility of taking one's time to formulate a thought as an appropriate mode of response in this kind of interaction, and it will therefore constitute a part of our mutual absorption in our conversation. When I feel self-conscious, this fluid interaction is disrupted. I am forced to think, not just about the topic of conversation, but also about how to respond to you. I must consciously deliberate about the manner of my response, about how to comport myself towards you, how long to hold eye contact and, indeed, how to stop appearing so self-conscious.

If this is right, then ordinary self-consciousness is a form of self-conscious social anxiety which involves an alteration in one's awareness of one's actions; and, moreover, an alteration which involves the awareness of one's actions as being disrupted by the other's gaze. When Anscombe describes ordinary self-consciousness as 'a feeling of being *troubled* by being observed', it is natural to assume that she is responding to this kind of anxiety. Care is needed here, however. To say ordinary self-consciousness is a way of being troubled suggests that it is inherently unpleasant. But though this anxious pressure is commonly experienced as unpleasantly uncomfortable, it would be hasty to conclude that it always is. To see this, it is worth contrasting ordinary self-consciousness and embarrassment with shame and humiliation. To take pleasure in one's experiences of shame and humiliation, one would have to be a masochist in the league of Dostoyevsky's protagonist in *Notes from Underground*. Ordinary self-consciousness and embarrassment, however, bear a more complex relation to pleasure and displeasure: though uncomfortable, they can be a source of humour (Miller 1995) and the anxious vulnerability of ordinary self-consciousness can make possible certain forms of excitement. Consider Nagel's (1969) example of Romeo and Juliet, each casting the other admiring glances across the room of a cocktail bar, each becoming aware that the other is aroused by them, each becoming aware that the other is aroused by their aroused response to them, and so forth. There is a case to be made that the anxious suspense of ordinary self-consciousness is the basis for the typical pleasures of flirtation. It is because Romeo and Juliet do not know where they stand with one another that this scene is so exciting for them and so rewarding when they succeed. The spontaneous harmony and mutual comfort characteristic of the later stages of a relationship, though they come with their own pleasures, largely replace these feelings of anxious excitement. It therefore seems to me that ordinary self-consciousness and embarrassment are alike in their complicated relation

to pleasure and displeasure, whereas shame and humiliation are more straightforwardly unpleasant.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3. *The 'prototypical' form of ordinary self-consciousness*

So far I have focused on the feeling of self-consciousness before another's gaze. But it's worth emphasising that I don't deny that there are other forms ordinary self-consciousness can take. Indeed, I have alluded to several: feeling self-conscious when someone is actively *avoiding* my attention, for example, or in anticipation of being stared at. There are many more: I can feel self-conscious during a videocall, being aware *that* I'm the object of another's attention, though I do not *feel* the gaze on me insofar as I do not see them as looking at me in particular.

Though feeling self-conscious before another's gaze isn't the only form of ordinary self-consciousness, it has explanatory priority over the others, in the sense that it makes all the other forms possible or gives them the importance that they have for us: it is the 'prototypical' case. And a satisfactory account of ordinary self-consciousness must explain how these different cases are related to the prototypical case so that it isn't a mere coincidence that we call them by the same name.

## §3. Ordinary self-consciousness: a reductive account

### 3.1 *'Seeing oneself through the eyes of another'*

The philosophical interest of ordinary self-consciousness lies in the special form of relation it involves towards another before whom one feels self-conscious. I will argue that it cannot be understood in terms of either of the standard forms of intersubjective relation acknowledged in recent discussions of intersubjectivity.

In the analytic tradition, the most common approach to intersubjective relations is reductive. The putative relation is explained in terms of the acts and states of a subject that are ontologically prior to any irreducible

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<sup>3</sup> Here I depart from O'Brien, who suggests that ordinary self-consciousness should be distinguished from embarrassment because embarrassment is inherently unpleasant, whereas ordinary self-consciousness can take pleasant or unpleasant forms. If I am right and the relation of both of these emotions to pleasure and pain is far from straightforward, then a distinction between them on this basis will also be insecure (as is instanced, perhaps, by our divergence of judgement on this topic). Nevertheless, I do think there is an interesting distinction to be made between embarrassment and ordinary self-consciousness. In particular, ordinary self-consciousness, on my view, is a way of being affected by another, in which one is affected by the other person's act of looking at one. The other person's attention and the feeling of self-consciousness are temporally concurrent. By contrast, though when one is embarrassed, one's embarrassment must be understood in relation to some actual social event, the social event in question needn't be concurrent with one's feeling of embarrassment. It's common enough to feel embarrassed *post-hoc*. This is tendentious (as we will see in §3, O'Brien would reject the claim that ordinary self-consciousness and the other's act of looking at one must be concurrent), but since my interest is not with how we classify ordinary self-consciousness and embarrassment, I will not seek to defend it here.

intersubjective relation that holds between these subjects. For example, the awareness of being looked at might be understood as a psychological state (the belief, judgement, perception or imagination) that one figures in the intentional contents of another's psychological state (e.g. Peacocke 2014; Ch. X; Nagel 1969; Husserl 1960).

Some philosophers have opposed this general approach by arguing, roughly, that certain forms of face to face communication in which each subject takes up 'an attitude of address' towards one another makes possible a special form of 'you-awareness'. On this view, in order for me to stand in this relation to you as 'you', you must also stand to me in this very same relation, and this must therefore be understood as a single experiential relation holding between two subjects.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary self-consciousness cannot be understood as a second person relation in this sense, since it does not necessarily involve the kind of 'mutuality' definitive of these relations: I can feel self-conscious before your gaze, without you being so much as aware that I am aware that you are looking at me — perhaps, for example, you think you are successfully spying on me. For the same reason, ordinary self-consciousness doesn't necessarily involve our taking up an 'attitude of address' to one another. This, if anything, would constitute another form of activity I could become immersed in; whereas ordinary self-consciousness seems to consist in the disruption of this kind of interaction. Maggie is immersed in Stephen's speech until she becomes aware that he is attending to her. This attention is manifested in his act of addressing her, but her self-consciousness in response to his attention undermines her ability to respond to his act of addressing her.

The Reductive Approach provides a more promising way of understanding ordinary self-consciousness. In the only dedicated study of ordinary self-consciousness, O'Brien (2011, p. 111-3) provides an outline of the structure of ordinary self-consciousness which is in accord with this general approach.<sup>5</sup> She suggests that it involves awareness of oneself 'from the perspective of another,' where this is understood as 'focus on oneself

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<sup>4</sup> See Eilan (2016), Longworth (2013), Rödl (2007) and Thompson (2012a, b).

<sup>5</sup> I must acknowledge that since O'Brien says that ordinary self-consciousness involves 'at least' these conditions, she does not foreclose the possibility of a Non-Reductive Approach. I say her approach is 'in accord with' rather than merely 'being compatible with' for two reasons. First, as we will see, the idea that the other subject is implicated in one's experience of ordinary self-consciousness insofar as one is conscious of oneself as one would appear from their perspective is exactly what a reductive theorist would have to say. Second, O'Brien's claim, discussed below, that I can feel self-conscious in private, where I myself play the role of 'the observer', suggests that it cannot consist in an irreducible relation between two subjects. If one makes the further assumption that there is a common core to these experiences, then one will be inclined to think of the relation of ordinary self-consciousness before another as reducing to the individualistically intelligible psychological states of each subject.

It is nevertheless worth noting that the objections I will offer apply independently of whether O'Brien's approach commits to the reductive approach or not: for the problem is the basic idea that we can understand the notion of 'seeing ourselves through the eyes of another' in terms of seeing ourselves from the third person perspective.

from the third person point of view.’ O’Brien’s account involves at least the following three conditions:

- (i) I am conscious of a person, A, from the third person point of view of another, B.

This states the fundamental way in which the other figures in my experience: they do so by providing the perspective from which I experience myself from the outside. I am related to B insofar as, in this experience, I imaginatively come to occupy her perspective on me. And, in doing so, I presuppose that I’m the person represented from this point of view:

- (ii) I am aware that I *myself* am A.

But care is needed here. It’s not as if I imagine some person and then — lo and behold! — realise that ‘that person is me!’ Nor is that I judge that someone, A, is the object of B’s awareness and that I am that person. Rather, that A is me as seen from the outside is presupposed in my very awareness of A from the third person point of view.

Finally, when I feel self-conscious, I am acutely aware of the fact that, depending on how I act, the other will either think well or poorly of me. O’Brien encapsulates this in the following condition:

- (iii) I am conscious of A as being a potential object of evaluation in accord with some evaluative schema.

Where the second person approach tends to privilege communicative metaphors, such as Levinas’s (1999, p. 197-8) thought that the other’s face makes a claim on me, the paradigm of this approach is visual.<sup>6</sup> When I feel self-conscious, I ‘see myself reflected in the eyes of another’. This metaphor goes at least as far back as Plato’s *Alcibiades*<sup>7</sup>:

Socrates: I’m sure you’ve noticed that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We call this the ‘pupil’, for it’s a sort of miniature of the man who’s looking.  
(132d-133a)

Just as I might see my reflection in the eyes of another, so when I see another’s facial expression and thereby become aware of their mental state, I become conscious of how I appear from their point of view, refracted through their standards and ideals (‘by their lights’). The role of the eyes

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<sup>6</sup> Levinas’s thought will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Or Plato’s, since there is some degree of controversy about the authorship of this dialogue.

and face, on this view, is *revelatory*: they reveal or manifest the other's view of me, causing me to see myself from their third person perspective.

The intentional object of this experience is myself, represented from the third person perspective of an observer. This, in turn, is intended to explain the way in which this experience is disruptive. As Merleau-Ponty observes:

The other's look becomes an annoyance for the child, and everything happens as though, when he is looked at, his attention is displaced from the task he is carrying out to a representation of himself in the process of carrying it out. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 152)

Just as seeing my reflection in a mirror when I am trying to talk to someone or hearing the sound of my own voice can distract me from what I am doing or saying, so imagining myself from the third person point of view can disrupt my absorbed activity.

There are two objections which give us reason to think this account describes something other than ordinary self-consciousness.

### 3.2 *Narcissism*

This account presents an unduly 'narcissistic' view of ordinary self-consciousness. In the myth, Narcissus sees his reflection in a lake and becomes immersed in the contemplation of himself.<sup>8</sup> For O'Brien, the disruption produced by ordinary self-consciousness is a variation on this theme, a kind of forced-narcissism, which leads me to imagine myself from another's perspective. This leads to two problems.

First, when I look at my reflection in a mirror, I am not interested in the mirror itself, or rather, I am interested in it only insofar as it enables me to look at myself, the true object of my interest. In this respect, the self-conscious person as envisaged by O'Brien is like Sir Willoughby Patterne in Meredith's *The Egoist*. Upon his return home after a long period abroad, we are told that he met a friend, and

read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let her go, saying "I could not have prayed for a lovelier home-scene to welcome me." (Meredith 1995, p. 22)

But when I feel self-conscious, the salient object of my attention is not myself, as seen or imagined from the outside, but the person who is staring at me. It is their gaze that I avoid in avoiding eye contact, which I seek to escape by leaving the room and avoiding social situations altogether. Of course, this is not to deny that in feeling self-consciousness, I am acutely conscious of *myself*. It is only to deny that this involves consciousness of myself from an observer's perspective. My awareness of myself, insofar as I

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<sup>8</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book III.

am affected by the other's gaze, is not observational in this way. It is, in Anscombe's phrase (2000, §8), 'non-observational'.

Second, there is nothing inherently other-involving about the kind of disruption involved in imagining oneself from the third person perspective. As the case of Narcissus reveals, a lake or mirror could have done the job just as well. O'Brien embraces this idea, suggesting that we might 'feel self-conscious before ourselves':

Imagine you are dancing on your own in your study. You could suddenly disengage from your leaping, seeing yourself from the outside, and thereby coming to feel self-conscious about what you are doing, quietly sitting back down to finish writing that paper. (O'Brien 2011, p. 112)

If the description of ordinary self-consciousness offered in §2 is correct, we should be reluctant to grant that this is a genuine instance of ordinary self-consciousness. There I observed that it is central to my *feeling* of self-conscious that it involves a kind of anxious disruption to my activity in which I am conscious of the other's attention as a exerting a pressure on me; and, moreover, that I am unsure how to respond to this attention. I do not know how to respond, where to put my hands or how to hold myself. This kind of anxiety doesn't occur in any of my so called 'relations with myself' — it requires another person. Indeed, it is plausibly *because* of this anxious suspense that we speak of *feeling* self-conscious in the first place.

If this does not deter one from describing this case as one of 'feeling self-conscious', rather than press the point, I would only insist that a proper understanding of this case must treat it as parasitic on the prototypical case rather than treating them on a level. It is from the prototypical case, which necessarily involves a relation to another, that the feeling of self-consciousness before a mirror acquires its anxiety-inducing character. When I feel self-conscious before my face in the mirror, or when I hear the sound of my own voice, I have an uncanny experience of myself which disturbs me. I might ask, "Do I really *look* like that?", "Is *that* what my voice sounds like to other people?" But why does this engender anxiety ('eugh, *that is me?*') rather than wonder ('wow, how could *I* be *that?*')?<sup>9</sup> The reason, I think, is that it reveals the deep disparity between my grip on how I appear (and how to act so as to appear) and how I actually appear (in so acting). This can make me lose my confidence in my ability to judge how I am likely to appear to another if I act in a specific way. I am no longer confident that speaking *in this way* makes the impression I intend it to make on another (see Holzman & Rousey 1966, p. 84); that looking *like this* will make the desired impression on another who is standing at a particular angle from me. All of this makes me more prone to the prototypical form of self-consciousness

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion of this sense of wonder, see Nagel (1986, Ch. IV)

and to a form of self-consciousness in anticipation of the prototypical form (see §4.5). It's in virtue of this relation to the prototypical case that so-called 'self-consciousness before oneself' gets its anxiety-inducing, nervous, character. A creature that did not feel self-conscious before the eyes of others in this way wouldn't agonise over their image in a mirror in quite the way that we do.

### 3.3 Unity and disruption.

Earlier, I adapted Sartre and observed that ordinary self-consciousness is consciousness of oneself before another. When Sartre (2018, p. 309) writes this (in writing of shame), he immediately adds that 'these two structures are inseparable'. By this he means that my consciousness of the other *as looking at me*, and my consciousness of myself *as looked at* are two aspects of a single state of mind. Sartre frequently describes the experience of being looked at by analogy with the experience of being touched, and this helps to characterise the relevant sort of unity characteristic of my awareness of myself before the gaze of another. When someone touches me, my exteroceptive awareness of their hand touching me and my interoceptive experience of pressure on my body are two aspects of a single state of awareness.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, my awareness of the other *looking at me*, and thereby *disrupting* my activity, and of myself *as being looked at* and my activity *as disrupted* are all aspects of a single state of awareness, none of which can be completely described independently of the others.

If this is right, then it is not as if in ordinary self-consciousness I take two perspectives on myself: (a) my *subject's* perspective on my activity 'from the inside' and my perceptual awareness of the other who is looking at me; and (b) an *observer's* perspective on myself, as seen 'from the outside', from the perspective of the other (compare O'Brien 2011, p. 106-107).

O'Brien's account is problematic in this regard since she suggests that ordinary self-consciousness *does* involve adopting two experiential perspectives on oneself in this way.<sup>11</sup> It places a wedge between my first personal inner awareness of my activity as disrupted and my awareness of the other as the source of this disruption. The latter, for O'Brien, must be understood in terms of my awareness of myself from the outside, from the other's third person perspective. But if this were true, these two perspectives and their objects would compete for my attention. Insofar as I attend to myself 'from the outside', I would be distracted from my awareness of my body and activity 'from the inside'. Insofar as I am immersed in my self-conscious awareness of my body and activity 'from the inside', I'm distracted from my awareness of myself 'from the third person

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<sup>10</sup> Martin (1992), Ratcliffe (2007, p. 170-1), and Kalderon (2018, Ch.1).

<sup>11</sup> This would not be a problem if the subject merely judged that they were seen and evaluated from the third person perspective. O'Brien is right to insist on more than this, however, in order to explain the disruptiveness of their experience of the other's gaze. I say more in §3.4.



point of view'. This is one problem, and it is related to two further problems.

First, this view seeks to explain the disruption to activity involved in ordinary self-consciousness because imagining myself from the third person point of view *distracts* me from the inner awareness of my body and my activity. But reflection on the phenomenology of ordinary self-consciousness suggests that the form of disruption it involves, far from *distracting* me from the inner awareness of my body, makes it *uncomfortably salient*. The other's gaze (as I emphasised in §2.2) modifies the felt character of my bodily awareness and my awareness of my activity in a way that cannot be explained on the assumption that the other is only involved in my experience insofar as I imagine myself from their point of view.

Second, to be distracted from my immersed activity by imagining myself from the third person perspective is a disruption, but a disruption of the wrong order. It is merely to be *distracted* from one form of activity by another activity, the act of self-contemplation. This is an act, moreover, in which one might become immersed, just like Narcissus. But the special form of anxious disruption characteristic of ordinary self-consciousness constitutes an obstacle to any form of immersed activity, including the act of imagining how one looks from the third person perspective of another.<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.4. *An alternative approach*

At this stage, it might be suggested that we interpret conditions (i)-(iii) in terms of belief or judgement rather than imagination. On such an interpretation, ordinary self-consciousness would not involve one taking an external experiential perspective on oneself. It would rather consist in believing or judging that another is aware of one from the third person point of view and that one is therefore up for evaluation by them. On this strategy, it will fall to (iii) to explain the way in which ordinary self-consciousness is disruptive. Perhaps it might be claimed that the judgement that one is up for evaluation for another, along with the desire to come off well, is what explains the special form of anxious disruption characteristic of ordinary self-consciousness.

There are two problems with a view of this sort. First, our awareness of the other's attention is experienced as being an acute source of pressure, one which transforms our awareness of our bodily activity. This disruptiveness characterises the manner by which we experience the other, rather than consisting in a mere judgement or belief that something we want (such as their good opinion of us) is on the line. Second, it this suggestion cannot capture the way in which the disruption characteristic of ordinary self-consciousness disrupts the possibility of any form of immersion. My awareness of the other absorbs me and yet I am unable to become immersed in my interaction with them. Simply judging that

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<sup>12</sup> For empirical support, see Markson and Paterson (2009)

something I care about is on the line doesn't explain why I cannot simply absorb myself in the activity of securing the good in question.

#### §4. A transactional account of ordinary self-consciousness.

##### 4.1 *Interpersonal transaction.*

The reductive account, I think, can seem attractive only insofar as we are trying to describe the relation between the self-conscious person and the person before whom they are self-conscious, not from the perspective of the subject, but from the perspective of a third party observing the interchange.<sup>13</sup> But, as we have seen, it faces serious problems as a description of the experience from the subject's point of view. What we need is an alternative to O'Brien's approach which understands ordinary self-consciousness in terms of a form of primitive interpersonal relation (and one which takes a different form than the essentially mutual relation emphasised by The Second Person Approach).

Sartre's discussion of 'the look' in Part III of *Being and Nothingness* suggests a way forward. Sartre claims that when I feel the other's gaze, I experience it as *acting upon me*. As Gardner (2005, pp. 330-1) puts the idea: 'the real meaning of the gaze', for Sartre, 'is that of an action...we do better to think of it on the analogy with the application of a physical force.' Sartre has a radical theory of what this amounts to: I am acted upon insofar as I am subjected to an ontological transformation: 'I am touched in my being' in such a way that 'essential modifications appear within my structures' (Sartre 2018, pp. 336). The other *freezes* me, transforming me from a being-for-itself, a being which 'is what it is not and is not what it is', into something which 'is what it is', a being-in-itself. Like the other, I too have this power. When I look at others they 'are frozen by me into objects' (Sartre 2018, pp. 364). Finally, the relation between the other's *freezing* of me and the *being frozen* that I undergo is not one between two constitutively independent events. Rather, they are two aspects of a 'profound unity of consciousnesses' or a 'unity of being' (as opposed to a Husserlian 'harmony of monads'). This is akin to Aristotle's thought that one and the same act is the manifestation of the active capacity of one thing (the sound-source's 'sounding') and the passive capacity of another (the hearer's 'hearkening') in such a way that this 'acting-and-being-acted-upon' is, Aristotle claims, 'one actuality' (see *On the Soul*, 3.2). Or, in the words of one contemporary philosopher of action, the other's *freezing me* and my *being frozen* are 'two aspects of a single material reality, a transaction between agent and patient' (Ford 2014, p. 15).

The excesses of Sartre's account aside, the idea that when I experience myself as looked at by another I experience myself as *acted upon* by them,

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<sup>13</sup> Both Peacocke (2014, p. 240) and O'Brien (2011, pp. 111-113), for example describe this relation from the third person point of view.

that we are related as *patient* and *agent*, and in such a way that what the other *does* and what I thereby *undergo* are two aspects of an irreducible transaction, is an important insight. Let's call this 'Sartre's Insight'.<sup>14</sup> If we are to appropriate this idea to explain ordinary self-consciousness it must be extricated from 'Sartre's Theory': the idea that I am transformed from being a being-for-itself into a being-in-itself. For Sartre's Theory to be coherent, it must be understood as relying on the radical ontology outlined in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>15</sup> In addition to its ontological commitments, this ontology is also phenomenologically problematic. This is because it commits Sartre to claiming that if I look at you, you are turned into an object and I remain a subject, and if you look at me you remain a subject and I am transformed into an object. It therefore constitutes an error theory of the form of subject-to-subject awareness characteristic eye contact (this phenomenon will be discussed further in Chapter Two).<sup>16</sup>

The appeal of 'Sartre's Insight' is expressed in our ingrained tendency of describing the gaze on the model of touch. We speak of *catching* another's eye, of *holding* their gaze, and of eye *contact*. To be touched, is, among other things, to be pressed against, handled, or moved from hand to hand: in general, it is to be *acted upon*.<sup>17</sup> So too, to experience oneself as looked at, on this view, is to experience oneself as *acted upon*. This idea is familiar in ancient Greek literature. Plutarch, for example, writes that:

the reciprocated gaze of the beautiful and that which is emitted by the eye, be it light or a current, melt and dissolve the lovers...For the glances of the beautiful, even if they look back from a great distance, kindle fire in the souls of their lovers (*Quaestiones Convivales* 5.7, in Cairns 2011, p. 48)

Cairns (2011) suggests that in thinking of the gaze on the model of touch many Greek poets were following the 'extramissive' theory vision popular at the time according to which the eyes emit a kind of ray which makes contact with, and can therefore act upon, the object of vision. We can supplement this observation with another. One reason that the poets and philosophers might have found this model so compelling is that it resonates with their experiences of being looked at by others, and from this insight they mistakenly generalised the idea judging that visual perception always involves a kind of action upon its object analogous to touch. Consider, in this respect, the colleague of Piaget who observed that:

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<sup>14</sup> To be clear, this is distinct from what Gardner (2017) calls 'Sartre's Original Insight'.

<sup>15</sup> For critical discussion, see Descombes (1980, p. 48ff).

<sup>16</sup> Or so I claim. A charitable reconstruction and critique of Sartre's position, though interesting and relevant, would go beyond my aims in this thesis. For useful discussion of Sartre's view, see Bauer (2001, Ch. 4); Jay (1993, Ch.5), Gardner (2005; 2017).

<sup>17</sup> See Kalderon (2018) for a general discussion of the significance of tactile metaphors in the philosophy of perception.

When I was a little girl I used to wonder how it was that when two looks met they did not somewhere hit one another. I used to imagine the point to be half-way between the two people. I used also to wonder why it was one did not feel someone else's look, on the cheek for instance if they were looking at one's cheek. (Piaget 1997, p. 48)

Piaget appeals to this as evidence of a primitive belief (in children) in an extramission theory of perception, according to which something like a ray is emitted by the eye and makes contact with the object of perception. Winer and Cottrell (1996) have offered evidence for similar beliefs in young children, which they, like Piaget, take to be evidence for a tacitly held extramission theory. But this is worth considering alongside another finding: that many adults believe that they can feel the unseen stares of others (Cottrell, Winer and Smith 1996).

At first glance, these beliefs seem to go hand in hand: the reason one might believe that one can feel the unseen stare of another is rooted in the belief that, in some sense, looking involves physical contact, which one might feel at the back of one's head. However, it was found that where the belief in extramission becomes less common with age, the belief that one can feel the unseen stares of others is more common in adults.

It is plausible to think that these findings can be explained on the hypothesis that these children and adults are being misled by a genuine aspect of the phenomenology of their experiences. If, as I have been suggesting, to experience oneself as looked is to experience oneself as, in some sense, being acted upon by the other's gaze, then this might lead children to think that looking in general, in some sense, involves physical contact, as in Piaget's example. Adults, with their education and more nuanced understanding of perception, recognise that to look at any object is not thereby to act upon it, but nevertheless continue to believe something similar about looking at other people. They implicitly understand that to experience oneself as looked at is to experience oneself as acted upon by another, and are misled by this into thinking that they could therefore feel the unseen stares of others.<sup>18</sup>

This suggestive, though admittedly speculative, hypothesis notwithstanding, these intuitive patterns of thought seem to suggest the deep, though inchoate, appeal of Sartre's Insight. In what follows, I will outline an account which seeks to retain this insight independently of Sartre's Theory.

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<sup>18</sup> The idea that the eyes have the power to act at a distance in this way might underlie the widespread belief in the evil eye. See, for example, the Introduction to Jay (1993) and Cairns (2011) and related mythology (as, for example, in gazes, such as Medusa's, that can turn men to stone, explicitly invoked in Sartre (2018)). Perhaps Sartre had this in mind when he claimed that 'man is always a sorcerer to man and the social world is primarily magical.' and of 'the magical aspects of faces, gestures and human situations' (Sartre 2002, pp. 56-57).

#### 4.2 *The power of the human gaze*

I take as my starting point our nature as self-conscious social animals rather than Sartre's ontology. A proper characterisation of the perspective *from which* we reflect on ordinary self-consciousness is one in which we find ourselves in a social world with other people whose significance for us isn't open to question. Their presence is not something I can be completely neutral on until I have a desire one way or another, or something that I might take no notice of or interest in. Rather, as Simone Weil observes:

Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence... the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out. If we step aside for a passer-by on the road, it is not the same thing as stepping aside to avoid a billboard; alone in our rooms, we get up, walk about, sit down again quite differently from the way we do when we have a visitor. (Weil 2005, p. 187)<sup>19</sup>

A common idea in the phenomenological tradition is that my awareness of the world is not simply that of a spectator. I find myself in a situation within the world that is teleologically structured affording possibilities for certain kinds of action and passion. Moreover, my consciousness of myself, my body and my activity is interdependent with my awareness of the world so understood: thus the phrase 'being-in-the-world'.<sup>20</sup> Sartre's insight is that the other's gaze transforms my practical situation and this is *eo ipso* a transformation of my awareness of myself. We can specify the character of this transformation as follows.

First, the other's attention transforms my situation by necessitating a response from me. As Korsgaard observes:

If I call out your name, I make you stop in your tracks...Now you cannot proceed as you did before. Oh, you can proceed, all right, but not just as you did before. For now if you walk on, you will be ignoring me and slighting me. It will probably be difficult for you, and you will have to muster a certain active resistance, a sense of rebellion. (Korsgaard 1996, p. 140)<sup>21</sup>

The same is true when I realise someone is attentively looking at me. I must either acknowledge or avoid their gaze, smile at them or say "what are *you* staring at?" But there is no possibility of their gaze having no impact on the character of my activity: even avoiding their gaze, forbearing from the

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<sup>19</sup> For further discussion of this passage see Cockburn (1990) and Wiggins (2006, pp. 243-4; 2009, p. 250ff; 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Husserl (1973), Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ratcliffe (2015, Ch. 2)

<sup>21</sup> Versions of this insight can also be found in Cavell (1969a, pp. 263-4; 1969b, pp. 332-3) and Franks (1996, p. 177).

instinctual urge to respond, or pretending that I haven't noticed, is something which now must be *done*, with 'a certain active resistance'.

Second, this transformation in my practical situation is interdependent with a transformation in my awareness of my body. I am aware of the other's gaze as necessitating a response from me, and since I care deeply about the impression I make on them, I become acutely aware of my body's natural expressiveness. That is, I become acutely aware of its capacity to reveal my thoughts, feelings and anxieties — to thwart my will, making me seen in ways that I don't want to be seen. In his writings on photography, Cavell (2005, p. 126) writes of the human body before the camera as becoming 'a field of betrayal more than a ground of communication', in the sense that the camera has the power to document 'the individual's self-conscious efforts to control the body each time it is conscious of the camera's attention to it'.<sup>22</sup> Even in so much as trying to control and present my body in a particular way, I often *thereby* reveal something about myself that I want to keep hidden. In effortfully trying to act comfortable before the other's gaze I am liable to reveal my lack of comfort (and, indeed, the embarrassing fact that I'm presenting myself in the first place). Yet, as Weil observes, before the other's gaze, I can't simply continue acting the way I was acting when I was alone. Appearing natural and comfortable in this situation is an achievement, something itself maintained against the pressure of the other's gaze, often with effort, and which feels different to the same movement performed in private.

#### 4.3 Confidence and Self-Consciousness

The other's gaze *acts upon* the person looked at but how exactly they are affected will depend, among other things, on their character, the stakes of the situation, and their social skills.<sup>23</sup>

The confident person is characteristically able to bear the pressure of the other's gaze, thereby blunting its disruptiveness. Confidence can be described, in part, as a disposition to be appropriately affected by this pressure on some occasions and not others: a disposition to be 'properly affected' as Kosman (2014a) puts it. The confident person will habitually interact with others in ways that accord with the social norms governing the social situation and the character of one's interlocutor in such a way that they unreflectively 'feel' certain kinds of social situation as calling for a certain kind of response, and they are thereby able to trust their habituated reactions and establish a rapport with others. The confident person will also have a kind of courage which quells the fear of embarrassment or humiliation characteristic of the self-conscious person.<sup>24</sup> Nothing said here entails that the confident person never feels self-conscious. On the

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<sup>22</sup> Recall the passage from Barthes quoted in footnote 2 above.

<sup>23</sup> See Crozier and Alden (2000).

<sup>24</sup> As Arendt (1988, p. 186) observes, 'courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self.'

Aristotelian scheme, this would characterise the deficiency of ‘overconfidence’ which is opposed, perhaps, to the ‘excess’ of shyness.<sup>25</sup> The confident person might feel self-conscious in certain situations; for example, when proposing to their partner or being caught *in flagrante delicto*.

We feel self-conscious, by contrast, when we’re unable to comfortably bear the pressure of the other’s gaze; when it disrupts our ability to take part in the free-flow of interaction. When I feel self-conscious, I am unable to ‘feel’ the social situation as calling for a certain kind of response. This might be due to my unfamiliarity with the social norms governing the situation in question (e.g. tipping culture while abroad); a lack of certain social virtues (e.g. the kind of humour which brings mutual relief in an uncomfortable situation); a lack of trust in my natural reactions (my sense, for example, that this joke would be well-met); or a deep-seated fear of embarrassment, rejection or humiliation. Because of this, the self-conscious person feels *acutely* aware of their *lack* of awareness as to how to comport themselves. They do not know where to look or what to say, and they have to think carefully about what to say next. This makes them seem distant, which in turn can exacerbate their feeling of self-consciousness.

The self-conscious (‘shy’) person’s inability to trust their natural reactions and fear of humiliation is important in exacerbating their sense that they must actively self-present. This thereby makes them more acutely aware of the possibility of being ‘betrayed’ by their body and more liable to hide or shrink into a corner. The confident person, by contrast, is able to avoid this because they are less fearful of embarrassment and humiliation and more trusting in their natural reactions and bodily expressions. They are not as afraid of another seeing them from an unflattering angle, and are more confident that this is unlikely to bring about any significant change in their relationship.

We can therefore say that the self-conscious person finds themselves caught in a difficult practical situation. They are “caught” in it since anything they do will constitute a response to the other, and yet acutely aware of their inability to respond in a natural and appropriate way. As such, the fantasies associated with self-consciousness concern abdication of their social agency. To actively escape, to run out of a room would cause further embarrassment, so the relevant fantasies are passive: to be gone, to disappear, or as Bernard Williams (1993, p. 89) suggests, ‘that the space occupied by me should be instantaneously empty’.

This account avoids the difficulties facing The Reductive Approach. First, when I’m self-conscious the other’s gaze necessitates a response from me and yet I don’t know how to respond: I’m therefore unable to either absorb myself in the interaction or anything else. This is why ordinary self-consciousness is not a mere distraction but a *sui generis* form of disruption which precludes immersion in anything else. Second, it captures the way in

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<sup>25</sup> See Aristotle’s remark on the mean in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6.

which though I'm acutely aware of myself *as being looked at* when I feel self-conscious, the intentional object of my experience is the other who I experience as *looking at me* and, moreover, it is faithful to the way in which these two phenomena are two aspects of a single state of awareness.

#### 4.4 On Doing and Suffering

This account enables us to retain Sartre's Insight without incurring the commitment of Sartre's Ontology. But this is not to deny that it has commitments of its own, the most obvious being the claim that what the self-conscious person *is undergoing* and what the person making them self-conscious *is doing to them* are two aspects of a single irreducible transaction. It is thereby in conflict with an influential view of agency on which agency extends no further than the limits of one's person. Davidson famously observed that all we ever do, strictly speaking, is move our bodies. In addition to this we might also acknowledge 'such troublesome cases as mental acts' (Davidson 1980, p. 59). But anything *beyond* the limits of one's person, such as a light's being switched on or a person's being made self-conscious, are 'further effects' of my activity. They are, it's true, 'further effects' in terms of which I might redescribe what I *actually* do. These, however, are mere redescriptions. What I do, strictly speaking, and what a patient undergoes are two constitutively independent events.

This would be a problem if Davidson's view was the only coherent view, but it is not. Anscombe (2000, §29), for example, provides an account according to which 'I do what happens'. That is, she suggests that what I am doing to the patient and what the patient is thereby undergoing are identical.<sup>26</sup> Ford (2014, p. 15) puts this by saying that what an agent *does* and what the patient *undergoes* are 'two aspects of a single material reality'. Consider the causative verbs emphasised by Anscombe: 'scrape, push, wet, carry, eat, knock over, keep off, squash, make (e.g. noises, paper boats), hurt' (Anscombe 1981b). As Hornsby (2011) observes, we cannot pry apart what the agent is doing in these cases and what the patient is undergoing, my eating of the burger from the burger's being eaten, for example, or my carrying of the suitcase from the suitcase's being carried. The causality here is internal to the transaction (Hornsby 2011, p. 107).

One final point. My consciousness of myself *as affected* by the other's gaze seems to be an instance of what Anscombe describes as a 'mental cause'. Anscombe wrote that mental causation is not amenable to a Humean analysis. 'A 'mental cause' is what someone would describe if he were asked the specific question: what produced this action or thought or feeling on your part: what did you see or hear or feel, or what ideas or images cropped up in your mind and led up to it' (Anscombe 200 §11, pp. 16-17). Just as the crocodile's snapping at me is what causes me to immediately jump back, so if I was asked what was making me self-conscious: I could say, without

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<sup>26</sup> This is an Aristotelian view, see *Physics* 3.3, *On the Soul* 3.2.



having to observe myself, that it was the other person staring at me. Of course, I am observing them, so my awareness of them is observational, but my experience of the causality itself is not observational. As Anscombe observes: ‘the cause itself qua cause (or perhaps one should say the causation itself) is in the class of things known without observation’ (Anscombe 2000, §9, p. 16). My consciousness of the transaction holding between us, to that extent, is non-observational: it cannot be reduced to what I observe.<sup>27</sup> As Wiseman (2016, p. 96-7) observes, these mental causes are essentially ‘for the patient’, i.e. one that ‘irreducibly relate[s] to the agent’s own account of what it was that she was responding to’. One reason a mental cause is not amenable to a Humean analysis is that what the crocodile or the other does, as in accord with Anscombe’s statement ‘I do what happens’, is what happens to me (‘what I undergo’), as opposed to two ontologically independent events: two ‘distinct existences’, as Hume might put it. This is how it might seem if we viewed the relation between the self-conscious person and the onlooker from the perspective of a third person: but from the perspective of the patient, their suffering and the other’s doing are one.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.5 *Anticipatory self-consciousness*

Though this is only an account of the prototypical form of self-consciousness, it provides a basis on which to explain non-central forms of ordinary self-consciousness, such as self-consciousness before an animal gaze, a camera, during a videocall or schizophrenic episode, and so on. These experiences require careful study for which I lack the space here. But I will illustrate my general approach to these cases with reference to anticipatory self-consciousness. Think of the self-consciousness you might feel standing outside of a restaurant waiting for your date, or when you’re waiting in the lobby before an interview. You feel self-conscious *in anticipation* of this imminent interaction though you don’t yet experience another’s gaze. Rather, just as you might brace yourself in anticipation of a physical blow, so you can feel a kind of self-consciousness in anticipation of being affected in the manner of self-consciousness before another’s gaze. The higher the stakes, the greater this nervousness will be.

It is an advantage of this account that it treats ordinary self-consciousness and anticipatory self-consciousness as structurally distinct. This enables it to acknowledge the differences between these experiences: the most obvious being that the anticipatory form, unlike the prototypical case, can be more easily subdued by immersing oneself in something such as a magazine or a mobile phone. This is due to the fact there’s no actual gaze necessitating a response from us. This account, moreover, acknowledges these differences whilst acknowledging the non-accidental

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<sup>27</sup> Wiseman (2016, p. 110, n. 8)

<sup>28</sup> Another, as Teichmann observes, is that our knowledge of the relevant causation is not one arrived at through observation or induction (Teichmann 2008, p. 183; cp. Hornsby 2011, p. 108).

relation between these forms of self-consciousness. Just as there would be no ‘bracing oneself in anticipation of a blow’ if there were no blows, so there would be no anticipatory self-consciousness if there were no episodes of ordinary self-consciousness before another’s gaze.

## §5. Conclusion

We cannot understand the feeling of self-consciousness before another’s gaze, or the experience of being the object of another’s gaze more generally, in the way suggested by The Reductive Approach. Reflection on the phenomenological structure of ordinary self-consciousness, instead leads to the recognition of a special form of interpersonal relation, an interpersonal transaction. According to The Transactional Approach, outlined in this chapter, we must retain what I have called ‘Sartre’s Insight’: that to feel self-conscious before another involves experiencing oneself as being acted-upon by the other subject. Like much resistance to the reductive account, this must be understood as a primitive, irreducible relation. But it is importantly distinct from recent accounts of second person relations in the way that it is *asymmetrical*. Recent criticism of The Reductive Approach has focused exclusively on the challenge it faces in making sense of forms of mutual awareness characteristic of face to face interaction, in effect conceding that it is able to make sense of asymmetric forms of interpersonal self-consciousness. It has been the argument of this chapter to suggest that such a concession would be a mistake, at least as far as ordinary self-consciousness is concerned. There are non-mutual, asymmetric, relations which also cannot be understood in terms of The Reductive Approach.

In the following chapters, I will draw upon The Transactional Approach to resolve a series of puzzles which emerge relating to the phenomenology of eye contact and joint attention. In Chapter Two, I explain how extending the account of interpersonal transactions introduced here can enable us to provide a more satisfying account of the phenomenology of eye contact than those offered by The Reductive Approach and The Second Person Approach. In Chapter Three this account of eye contact, in turn, will provide the basis for an account of joint attention.

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## When Eyes Touch

If two gazes come into contact, the one with the other, the question will always be whether they are stroking or striking each other — and where the difference would lie? (Derrida 2005, p. 2)

### §1. Introduction

#### *1.1. The significance of eye contact.*

When we make eye contact, we experience a form of interpersonal connection that plays a central role in human social life, communication and interpersonal understanding. From the earliest days of infancy, infants are sensitive to the eyes of others, preferring to look at faces over other kinds of stimuli and faces that return their gaze most of all (Farroni et al 2002). By around six weeks of age, infants become capable of holding eye contact with their caregiver and, as Stern (1977, p. 46) puts it, the caregiver ‘experiences for the very first time the very certain impression that the infant is really looking at her, even more, into her eyes...that she and the baby are finally ‘connected’’. Later this connection takes a communicative form in the play of expression and response psychologists call ‘protoconversation’ and, by around nine to twelve months of age, in facilitating episodes of joint attention.<sup>1</sup> The motivation to engage in this form of interpersonal connection for its own sake is thought by many to be a distinctive feature of human social life, and to have played a role in the evolution of human language and thought (Tomasello 2019). This is arguably reflected in the peculiar morphology of the human eye, which is relatively elongated and has a greater amount of visible white sclera, thereby facilitating eye contact and gaze following (Kobayashi and Koshima 2001).<sup>2</sup>

The eyes and face have a special place in our communicative repertoire. Not only are they the most expressive parts of the human body, but it is ‘to

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<sup>1</sup> See Stern (1977); Trevarthen (1979); Tronick et al (1979); Bruner (1983); & Reddy (2008, Ch. 5-6).

<sup>2</sup> This is not to imply that all humans are oriented to eye contact in the same way. Autistic children engage in eye contact with less frequency than non-autistic children, and tend to find it emotionally aversive. This discomfort is also a distinctively human form of orientation to eye contact — for discussion, see Hobson (2002) and Hobson & Hobson (2011). Nor do I deny that this form of connection (or some similar form of connection), can be established through mutual touch, conversation or joint speech.

them' that others address us, and 'from them' that we address others in turn. These points, paired with the fact that the appearance of our face and its manner of expression are typically the features most distinctive of our individual appearance, contribute to the pre-scientific tendency to think of ourselves as, in some sense, located in the eyes and face (for further discussion of these points see Cockburn 1985 and Moran 2017).

Eye contact therefore constitutes a fundamental form of interpersonal *contact*, not merely in developmental terms, but also for adults. Where there is no possibility of eye contact, as during phone calls or online videocalls, we feel distant or detached from one another. This is a curious omission from Setiya's (2020) observation that, during videocalls, 'there is a void between us. We cannot feel each others' breaths or movements; we cannot look at the same object in our surroundings; we cannot sense each others' warmth or stand together or apart; we cannot touch.' After all, being able to make eye contact is a typical feature of most of our face to face interactions, whereas many of the things on Setiya's list are generally reserved for only our most intimate relationships.

Eye contact also seems to play a significant role in our pre-reflective understanding of ethical life. Feinberg (1970, p. 252), for one, writes that 'having rights enables us to...look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone', and Darwall (2005, p. 43) observes that the etymological root of respect, the latin '*respicere*', means 'to look back' at another, which he suggests is related to the idea of meeting another's gaze as a way of reciprocating another's act of second personal address.

Finally, eye contact plays an important role in human emotional life. The interaction between an infant and a caregiver is a prolonged, enjoyable one, but most forms of eye contact between adults involve a feeling of exposure, a feeling which renders uninvited or excessive attempts to make eye contact invasive and which makes prolonged episodes of eye contact uncomfortable, even among friends. Striking the right balance of eye contact is a delicate task, one which can generate feelings of self-consciousness. Prolonged episodes of eye contact usually occur during episodes of heightened emotional and physical arousal, especially during episodes of mutual intimacy or aggression. The avoidance of eye contact, moreover, plays a salient role in the phenomenology of shame, guilt and humiliation. In *King Lear*, Cornwall blinds Gloucester in order to avoid his shame-inducing gaze (see Cavell 1969b). Sophocles's Oedipus, in contrast, blinds himself, and does so out of a desire to sever all contact with the interpersonal realm:

Thus branded as a felon by myself,  
 How had I dared to look you in the face?  
 Nay, had I known a way to choke the springs  
 Of hearing, I had never shrunk to make

A dungeon of this miserable frame,  
 Cut off from sight and hearing; for 'tis bliss  
 To bide in regions sorrow cannot reach.

(*Oedipus the King*, p.127)

### 1.2 Eye 'contact'

Despite its significance, eye contact has received little in the way of dedicated philosophical exploration. Yet in so much as raising the topic, we employ language which is, on reflection, fascinating. As I noted in the last chapter, we display a deep and pervasive tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch. We speak of eye *contact*, of *catching* another's eye and of *holding* their gaze. And in doing so, we make *contact* and *connect* with them — thus, in the literature on 'joint' attention, eye contact is called 'contact attention'. More generally, the eyes are described as being able to *pierce*, *probe* and *penetrate*.

The guiding thought of this chapter is that these metaphors deserve attention.<sup>3</sup> They play a powerful, often unacknowledged, role in our thought, and they are so familiar that we often use them without realising that we are deploying metaphors. I will now offer three reasons to take these metaphors seriously.

First, they have the power to mislead us, especially when we forget they are informing our thought. This is sometimes said of the metaphor of the mind as an inner 'theatre' (e.g. Kenny 1971) or the memory as a 'storehouse' (e.g. Margalit 2002). O'Shaughnessy (2003, p. 183) warns against over-interpreting the notion of perceptual contact as a kind of 'concrete contact of the mind with its object...a palpable connection of some kind, rather as if the gaze literally reached out and touched it.' Later, I will suggest that there is a risk of being misled in our thought about eye contact by certain visual and communicative metaphors (of the eyes as a 'window' to the soul and of the face as making a 'claim' on us).

Nevertheless, the reason that they have the power to mislead is plausibly that they have some intuitive appeal. This is the second reason: reflecting on what makes these metaphors apt can reveal something about our experience which might otherwise evade our notice. I think these metaphors draw attention to two intuitions in particular.

One intuition is that eye contact is a form of *intersubjective contact*, just as touching someone is a form of physical contact. Heron (1970, p. 243) observes that, '[i]n mutual touching as in mutual gazing, each person both gives and receives in the same act and receives moreover what the other person is giving.' Eye contact is a relation within which two subjects stand together, each being immediately present to the other in a way they would not be if they were not both present to each other in this way, in a single relation.

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<sup>3</sup> In this respect, I have been influenced by Kalderon (2018)

The second intuition is that eye contact is an *engaged practical relation*. Unlike vision, which enables us to survey our environment without interacting with it, to touch something is typically to act upon it, to press against it and move it from hand to hand: the object checks my activity, maintaining its shape against my grip, weighing me down as I try to lift it up (MacMurray 1957, p. 107). Eye contact is analogous to touch in this respect: when we make eye contact, we aren't merely related as spectators of one another's mental lives; we have to catch another's eye and hold their gaze, often with effort, and when we do, we thereby interact with one another.

This brings us to the third and final reason to attend to these metaphors. Doing so serves as a corrective against two widespread tendencies in modern philosophy: visuocentrism and contemplativism.

Visuocentrism is, as MacMurray (1957, p. 104) remarks, the tendency to treat, 'vision as the model of all sensory experience' and to 'proceed as though it were certain that a theory of visual perception will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to all other modes of sense-perception'. Though this revolt against visuocentrism is a rallying cry of recent discussions in the philosophy of perception (e.g. O'Callaghan 2007, p. 3-4), MacMurray's early statement of the tendency is interesting insofar as he associates it with something more general: the tendency of treating knowledge and experience on the model of visual contemplation. It's this tendency Anscombe (2000, §32, p. 57) describes when she complains that modern philosophers have an 'incurably contemplative conception of knowledge.' This has as a consequence the assimilation of practical knowledge to the model of theoretical knowledge, and the resulting picture presents practical knowledge 'as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting.'<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly perhaps, I think a similar tendency is at work in philosophical thought about eye contact, insofar as visual metaphors of 'seeing oneself reflected through the eyes of another' are often privileged over the tactile metaphors that are used more commonly in ordinary contexts to describe eye contact.

### 1.3. Outline

I have three aims in this chapter. First, I will argue that the standard ways of thinking about eye contact in the philosophical literature are unsatisfactory. In doing so, I make a case for thinking that the source of this dissatisfaction and the path forward can be identified by reflecting on our tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch. Finally, I will outline a neglected account of eye contact, one which is able to avoid the difficulties faced by its competitors.

I will begin by identifying three ways in which the eyes and face figure in communication: by revelation, illocution and transaction. Each account of

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<sup>4</sup> These tendencies and their relationship would be an interesting object for a historical study. Anscombe and O'Callaghan associate contemplativism and visuocentrism respectively with the early modern tradition.

eye contact I consider privileges one of these forms of ‘facial communication’ (§2). In §3, I consider Peacocke’s (2014) reductive account of eye contact and argue that it is committed to viewing eye contact as a fundamentally contemplative relation and fails to offer a satisfying explanation of the intuition that eye contact is a form of intersubjective contact. In §4 I consider the main alternative to this account, according to which eye contact should be thought of as involving a primitive second person relation (e.g. Eilan 2016, Forthcoming A). However, this is found to be implausible as a general explanation of the structure of eye contact. Rather than thinking eye contact is constituted by a second person relation, there is reason to think it is a more fundamental form of relation which makes second person relations possible. Reflection on the analogy between eye contact and mutual touch leads to the recognition of a neglected account of eye contact, which takes transactional looks to be central. According to this view, when two subjects make eye contact, they are related as two agents acting and being acted upon by one another in a single, primitive transaction (§5).

## §2. Three forms of ‘facial communication’

The eyes and face figure in communicative interaction in a variety of different ways. We can distinguish at least three ways in which one’s gaze, or a ‘look’, can figure in human communication.

(i) *Revelatory Looks*. First, the eyes and face are ‘windows to the soul’ which reveal our mental states. They can therefore be said to ‘communicate’ in a broad sense, insofar as they reveal or manifest our mental states: as, for example, when Hume writes of ‘a communication of sentiments’ (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.1.11.19). As Wittgenstein observes,

Look into someone else’s face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular *shade* of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor and so on. (Wittgenstein 1967, §220)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also Wittgenstein:

We *see* emotion...We do not see facial contortions and make inferences from them (like a doctor framing a diagnosis) to joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the gestures. (Wittgenstein, 1967 §225)

We need not think of the state of mind as merely externally related to what we see. As McDowell argues, what we see might either be the state of mind itself, or some expression which does not fall short of the fact that one is in the relevant state of mind (see McDowell 1998d, p. 387).

Though intentional actions might manifest, and in this sense communicate, one's state of mind, they are not necessarily done with the intention of communicating one's state of mind to another; and they do not generally aim at recognition from another (Goldie 2000, p. 126). Nevertheless, there are some revelatory looks which can take the form of intentional communicative acts. For example, though my expression of fear at the sound of an explosion is not voluntary, I might voluntarily forbear from giving in to my inclination to hide or suppress my reaction so that others can see how I feel. I might even voluntarily turn towards others, enabling them to see my natural reactions (compare Campbell 2017, p. 123).

(ii) *Illocutionary Looks*. Suppose we are sitting together in a train compartment when the smell of petrol fills the carriage. I look over to you and say "Yuck, that smells nasty". In uttering these words, I perform the speech act of telling you that it's nasty (or perhaps of acknowledging its nastiness to you). Perhaps it's possible to perform the same illocutionary act non-verbally by looking up to you, blocking my nose, and making the kind of "yucky face" which is all but impossible to describe, and yet which is all too easy to recognise (see Gilbert 2014, p. 328). In other circumstances you might perform the act of disagreeing with me by saying: 'No p is false' by shaking your head and making an 'incredulous' face. The exact facial configuration one adopts to perform illocutionary acts will undoubtedly be related in interesting ways to our instinctive revelatory expressions, but they will also be permeated by local conventions. As with illocutionary speech acts (and unlike revelatory looks) illocutionary looks are necessarily intentional: the subject's understanding of what they are doing in expressing themselves in this way is an essential feature of these speech acts (Moran 2018, p.149). Moreover, these acts are overtly directed towards another, from whom they aim at receiving a certain kind of uptake, without which they will be 'unhappy', unsuccessful, or incomplete (Austin 1962, pp. 115-6). What this uptake amounts to will vary with the specific speech act, but in general it requires that the other recognises that one is trying to perform the relevant speech act towards them and entertains a specific first person thought. Typically, my recognition that you are trying to tell me p is sufficient for you to have succeeded in telling me p (Hornsby 1994; Moran 2018).

By and large, philosophers have tended to focus on the revelatory and illocutionary aspects of looks, but this is to neglect a third form of facial communication which I will call 'transactional looks'.

(iii) *Transactional Looks*. Unlike mere revelatory looks, transactional looks are often intentional acts, but unlike illocutionary looks they don't necessarily seek to achieve their purpose via the recognition of a communicative intention and the other person's recognising the intention with which they are done is not sufficient for their success. Transactional looks involve one subject acting upon another, exerting a force upon them, as when one stares at another to make them feel self-conscious, 'looks



daggers' at them to intimidate them or pulls a funny face to make them laugh.

Each of these forms of 'facial communication' can be instantiated by a single facial expression. When I shout at someone, for example, I might reveal my frustration with them, bark an order at them and induce a feeling of shame in them.

The purpose of drawing attention to these different forms of communication is to identify the motivations behind two common ways of thinking about eye contact, and to identify a third, less commonly acknowledged, understanding of eye contact. Each account takes its cue from one of these forms of facial communication: The Reductive Approach privileges revelatory looks; The Second Person Approach privileges illocutionary looks. And, just as transactional looks tend to be neglected by philosophers, so too does the account of eye contact which takes them to be fundamental — The Transactional Approach. This is unfortunate because it is the most promising account of them all. Or so I will argue.

### §3. Eye contact as reciprocal revelation

#### 3.1. *The Reductive Approach*

When we make eye contact, I attend to you as you attend to me and that we are so comported to one another is mutually manifest to each of us. How are we to understand these metaphors of 'interpersonal contact' and 'mutual openness'? As Peacocke (2005, p. 298) asks: can we characterise what is going on between us without employing these metaphors?

A common approach to this question seeks to provide a reductive account of the kind of interpersonal relation these metaphors describe. According to 'The Reductive Approach', these relations can be understood in terms of the kind of acts and states of each individual that are themselves ontologically antecedent to the relation of eye contact. The parsimony of this account has wide appeal: it promises to explain what might appear to be a *sui generis* relation in terms of the acts and states of individuals which are arguably better understood and which are in any case required, to understand their representation of the world in general.

Peacocke (2014) articulates an account with this general structure (see also Nagel 1969). His account of eye contact is as follows.<sup>6</sup> We have two subjects,  $x$  and  $y$ :

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<sup>6</sup> Peacocke's account is incomplete and programmatic. Since my aim is not to carry this project through but to draw attention to issues which will apply to any account of this structure, I stay close to his original formulation and, for the sake of simplicity, and therefore pass over several difficulties with the formulation of Peacocke's account. One potential source of difficulty is the fact that this seeks to characterise the situation of mutual interpersonal self-consciousness, not as it is from the point of view of a participant, but from the perspective of an outside observer of the situation.

- (1)  $x$  sees  $y$ .
- (2)  $y$  sees  $x$ .<sup>7</sup>

This is consistent with each subject thinking that the other isn't aware of them. We require, therefore, an embedding of mental states

- (3)  $x$  sees that  $y$  sees  $x$  (and  $x$  recognises that  $x^*=x$ ).
- (4)  $y$  sees that  $x$  sees  $y$  (and  $y$  recognises that  $y^*=y$ ).

The parenthesised section is meant to capture the way in which  $x$  sees, not merely that  $y$  sees some person,  $x$ , but that  $x$  sees that  $y$  sees  $x$  *himself* (thus ' $x^*$ ' and ' $y^*$ ' in Casteñeda's 1966 notation). ' $x^*$ ' and ' $y^*$ ' may therefore be read as symbolising the non-conceptual parents of  $x$  and  $y$ 's respective I-thoughts — what Peacocke calls Degree 1 Self-Representation. This therefore describes the kind of non-conceptual experience that a being with concepts might express by saying 'They see me'.

(3) and (4) are consistent with each thinking that the other is an inanimate object. Therefore, we need an additional layer of embedded content:

- (5)  $x$  is aware that (4).
- (6)  $y$  is aware that (3).<sup>8</sup>

However this is compatible with each subject not recognising the other as capable of self-ascribing I-Thoughts (or Degree 2 Self-Representation). This comes with a further level of embedding, which Peacocke formulates as follows:

- (7)  $x$  is aware that  $y$  is aware that  $x$  is in a state in which  $x$  would sincerely say 'He sees me'.

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<sup>7</sup> Or: (1\*)  $x$  sees  $y$ 's eyes & (2\*)  $y$  sees  $x$ 's eyes, to exclude the case where each is looking at the other's feet. This is open to additional difficulties: it doesn't distinguish between genuine eye contact and each person looking at another's eyes over a videocall. I put these difficulties to one side, conceding that they might be avoided in a more systematic formulation.

<sup>8</sup> Peacocke formulates (3) and (4) as follows:

- (3\*)  $x$  sees that  $y$  sees  $x$
- (4\*)  $y$  sees that  $x$  sees  $y$

The problem is that (5\*) then comes out as ' $x$  is aware that (4\*)'. But this is compatible with  $x$  not knowing that it is he, himself, who is the object of  $y$ 's awareness, or perhaps losing track of which of them,  $x$  or  $y$ , he is (see Martin 2014, p. 37). In this respect, my formulation is closer to O'Brien (2011). (3) & (4) are not themselves without difficulty (see Rödl 2007, p. 189).

And likewise, for  $y$ :

- (8)  $y$  is aware that  $x$  is aware that  $y$  is in a state in which  $y$  would sincerely say ‘He sees me’.

Peacocke claims that we must stipulate that ‘he sees me’ is in each case suitably based on the individual’s visual experience (ibid. p. 241).

There are two grounds for dissatisfaction with this account, each related to our tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch.

### 3.2. *Eye contact as an engaged relation*

First, this account sits uneasily with the intuition that eye contact is an engaged relation (as described in §1.2). It envisages eye contact as grounded in revelatory looks:  $x$  encounters  $y$  and  $y$ ’s facial expression and comportment towards  $x$  reveals  $y$ ’s psychological state, which represents  $x$  as being a particular kind of way (and the same goes for  $y$ ). This prioritises the metaphor of the eyes as ‘windows to the soul’ which reveal one’s mental states.  $x$ ’s awareness of  $y$ ’s awareness is also revealed to  $y$  through their facial expression and comportment to  $y$ , enabling  $y$  to see themselves ‘reflected in  $x$ ’s eyes’, refracted through their beliefs, values and ideals. When they make eye contact, therefore, they are like two mirrors reflecting one another, potentially *ad infinitum*.

Just as mirrors reflect passively, so this reciprocal revelation is fundamentally a passive, spectatorial one. The title of Peacocke’s book, *The Mirror of the World* is revealing in this respect. It alludes to Schopenhauer’s name for the pure subject of aesthetic experience which engages in disinterested contemplation of the world, bracketing the practical significance of objects and contemplating their essences — ‘a pure, cognising being, as an untarnished mirror of the world’ (Schopenhauer 1969. p. 417; Peacocke 2014, p. v).<sup>9</sup> Eye contact, however, seems to be an engaged relation; something we must engage in and actively maintain, often with effort. The other’s gaze has impact on our activity and emotional life, often making us act and feel self-conscious. Peacocke’s account therefore incurs the burden of explaining this intuition on the basis of his view that, at the fundamental level, the form of interpersonal awareness involved in eye contact is one of two spectators of one another’s mental lives.

It is open to a reductive theorist to insist that my state of interpersonal self-consciousness with respect to another — conscious that they are a self-conscious subject who is conscious of me — inherently involves an emotional response, which in turn will motivate certain forms of action. Nagel (1969, p. 11), for example, uses the phrase ‘ $x$  senses  $y$ ’ to describe a

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<sup>9</sup> The revelatory aspect, for example, is arguably present in Grice’s (1957) reductive account of communication (for discussion on this point, see Moran 2018, especially Ch.4 §1 ‘Grice: The Production of Belief (in Others) through the Revelation of (One’s Own) Belief?’

form of perceptual awareness of another's arousal which *eo ipso* involves being affected with arousal and desire. Perhaps the point could be made more generally.

In order for this approach to succeed, it must be able to aptly characterise the way in which I am affected by another's gaze when I am making eye contact with them, and in particular, the way in which I feel 'exposed' before their gaze. This, after all, is essential to the way in which eye contact can be anxiety inducing, intimate or invasive.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, suggests that the intuition that eye contact is a form of engaged relation cannot be separated from the intuition that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact.

### 3.3. *Eye contact as interpersonal contact*

The Reductive Approach faces a serious difficulty in explaining the intuition that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact. Consider a version of Nagel's (1969) example of Romeo and Juliet. Sat at opposite ends of a bar, each is carefully and covertly watching the other through nervous sidelong glances, but they don't make eye contact. After a while, Romeo becomes aware that Juliet is watching him and begins covertly watching her watching him. Romeo is therefore interpersonally self-conscious with respect to Juliet. Juliet, in turn, might become aware that she is being watched by Romeo, and on this basis become interpersonally self-conscious with respect to Romeo. In this case, each is conscious of the other as a self-conscious subject, but they do not connect in the way characteristic of eye contact. That they are both interpersonally self-conscious with respect to one another is not 'out in the open' between them, since they are both covertly attending to one another. Nor would it be sufficient to characterise eye contact to say that Juliet becomes aware that Romeo is interpersonally self-conscious with respect to her and that Romeo becomes aware that Juliet is interpersonally self-conscious with respect to him. After all, they might also each become aware of this through covert attention. This constitutes a situation of symmetrical interpersonal self-consciousness as described by Peacocke in conditions (1)-(8), but because *ex hypothesi*, each is covertly attending to the other, it does not capture the mutual openness or connection characteristic of eye contact.

The reductive theorist is likely to respond to this by appealing to yet further layers of iterated content. The more complex these intentional contents, the more difficult they become to state, let alone to refute by counterexample. Nevertheless, these considerations are sufficient to reveal a problem with The Reductive Approach. The problem is that Peacocke treats the form of awareness each has of the other in eye contact as being of the

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<sup>10</sup> The arguments of the last chapter suggest The Reductive Account cannot meet this challenge. For now, however, I choose to press the question of whether it can capture the special kind of mutual contact involved in eye contact.

same form as Romeo's awareness of Juliet when they are covertly attending to one another. Romeo's interpersonal self-consciousness of Juliet as a self-conscious subject who is conscious of him, in this case, is compatible with Juliet not being interpersonally self-conscious with respect to him. This is what generates the need to appeal to her awareness of Romeo's awareness of her, his interpersonal self-consciousness with respect to her, Romeo's awareness of Juliet's awareness of this and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*. But no matter how many further layers of embedded content the reductivist appeals to, they won't capture what is shared between two subjects in eye contact, the way they make contact. At each level of embedding we are left with two subjects, who are in constitutively independent psychological states, and whose psychological states share no intentional contents in common. As Carpenter & Liebel (2011, p. 166) put it, this account leaves us with 'two individual perspectives that never meet in the middle'. The problem here is not that there are two perspectives, two 'sides' to the relation — this much is undeniable. The difficulty is rather that each subject's awareness does not 'reach out' to the other and, as a result, there is a 'gap' between them: they do not make *contact*.<sup>11</sup>

The Reductive Approach therefore fails to explain the form of interpersonal contact characteristic of eye contact. There are two aspects to this intuition. First, eye contact seems to be a basic form of shared experience, a 'meeting of minds'. Second, when two subjects make eye contact, each is conscious of the other in a way which constitutively depends on the other being aware of them in that selfsame way. Just as I cannot shake hands with another if they aren't also shaking hands with me, so I cannot make eye contact with another if they aren't actively looking into my eyes as I look into theirs.

### 3.4. *Going forward*

There are therefore serious obstacles to providing a reductive explanation of the 'mutual openness' of eye contact. And though these objections do not leave The Reductive Approach without any room for manoeuvre, they do call into question whether it provides the most natural way of thinking about eye contact.

In this respect, it appears more faithful to the phenomenology of eye contact to think of it as an ontologically basic relation, and to think of each subject's state of awareness of the other as specifiable only in terms of this basic relation which holds between them. This kind of anti-reductive approach need not deny the potential for the kind of recursive thought emphasised by the reductive approach; it need only deny that the relation of eye contact reduces to recursive states of this sort. Rather, one might

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<sup>11</sup> This parallels intuitions about perceptual contact. See Putnam (1994, p. 453).

suggest the basic interpersonal contact in many cases constitutes the epistemic basis for these forms of recursive thought.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, if the anti-reductive approach simply insists that the ‘mutual openness’ of eye contact is to be understood as a *sui generis* feature of our psychological lives about which little further can be said in the way of analysis or explanation, then The Reductive Approach might continue to have some appeal, these phenomenological objections notwithstanding. The reason for this is that The Reductive Approach seeks to provide a positive explanation of the form of ‘intersubjective contact’ characteristic of eye contact in terms that are arguably better understood. This need for further explanation can seem particularly attractive insofar as we are in need of (a) an explanation of why this form of ‘interpersonal contact’ is established through eye contact but not through reciprocal covert attention; and (b) an explanation of the way in which eye contact is an inherently engaged practical relation.<sup>13</sup>

If this is right, a dialectical stalemate threatens to ensue. On the one hand, ‘The Anti-Reductive Approach’ seems to be truer to the phenomenology of eye contact and yet might seem to lack explanatory ambition; on the other, The Reductive Approach seeks to provide a positive explanation of the structure of eye contact, but faces serious difficulties in doing so. I will argue ‘The Anti-Reductive Approach’ can avoid this stalemate by denying that the most satisfying explanation of eye contact takes the form of a reductive analysis. With this aim in mind, I will consider two ways in which one might provide a non-reductive explanation of eye contact, one which understands it in terms of illocutionary looks (The Second Person Approach) (§4); another in terms of transactional looks (The Transactional Approach) (§5).

## §4. Eye contact as mutual address

### 4.1. *The Second Person Approach*

In recent years, The Reductive Approach has been met with resistance by philosophers who think that when subjects engage in certain forms of face to face interaction, they thereby stand in an ontologically basic second personal relation and that each has, in being so related, a *sui generis* form of ‘you-awareness’ of the other. By and large, this approach has been advanced as an account of second personal thought (or ‘I-Thou thought’). In recent years, however, Eilan has outlined an account which is intended to apply to non-conceptual modes of awareness including eye contact and joint attention.

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<sup>12</sup> Compare Campbell (2005) on joint attention.

<sup>13</sup> The thought that there is such a need is expressed by Carpenter & Liebel (2011, p. 167) and Eilan (Forthcoming A, p. 5, p. 10, p. 15-16).

To understand this account, we must first understand the view of second person thought it takes as its starting point. Suppose I say to you: “you’ve got spinach in your teeth”. For me to succeed in telling you this, you must hear and understand what I’ve said and what I understand myself to be doing. This requires you to meet ‘the first person pickup requirement’: you must entertain the thought ‘I’ve got spinach in my teeth’ (Eilan 2016, p. 321). Many who think that there is a distinctive form of second person thought argue that the relation between my you-thought (‘you’ve got spinach in your teeth’ and your I-thought (‘I’ve got spinach in my teeth’) is one of identity: it is a single I-Thou thought with two subject-slots (Longworth 2013, 2014; Rödl 2007 Ch.6, 2014; Thompson 2012a, 2012b).

Eilan suggests that we can view the relation two subjects stand in during episodes of face to face interaction analogously:

The radical line I think we need to take if the idea of primitive you-awareness is to so much as get off the ground is to say that the way A is aware of B in such cases constitutively depends on B meeting the first-person pickup requirement. (Eilan 2016, p. 322)

How should we understand this form of relation? Eilan’s account consists of two claims.

The first is ‘The Interdependence Claim’ that A’s awareness of B is ontologically dependent on B’s awareness of A and *vice versa*. This is a claim in common with all who maintain that eye contact is a primitive experiential relation.

The second claim, ‘The Communication Claim’ is a positive specification of what this structure amounts to, and therefore to provide an alternative explanation of the phenomenological structure of eye contact to undercut The Reductive Approach. The idea here is that eye contact, unlike symmetrical covert attention, is an essentially ‘communicative relation’ in which each subject takes up an ‘attitude of address’ towards the other, and meets some analogue of the first person pickup requirement with respect to the other’s awareness of them.

Eilan’s account of this communicative relation can be understood in at least two ways, depending on how we understand the notion of ‘communication’ and ‘address’: either in terms of linguistic address and the performance of an illocutionary act, or in terms of a more fundamental, and more elusive, form of interpersonal communication.

#### *4.2. Communication and illocution*

The most straightforward way of understanding a case in which each subject takes up an ‘attitude of address’ to the other is to think of two parties in a conversation, each of whom, at different points, addresses the other with an illocutionary speech act and acknowledges the other’s speech

acts directed to them. This would therefore be to claim that the relation between two subjects making eye contact is the same kind of interpersonal relation which holds between two subjects who share an I-Thou thought on the views described above. Just as, on this view of I-Thou thought, when I tell you something and you recognise my telling, we share an I-Thou thought, so when we make eye contact, I in some sense address you with my gaze and, when you reciprocate my gaze, you thereby acknowledge my act of address (cp. Darwall 2005, p. 43). In doing so, so the view goes, we thereby stand in a primitive I-Thou relation.

Levinas seems to suggest something like this when he writes that ‘the face speaks to me’ (Levinas 1999, p. 197-8) and that ‘[t]here is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me...I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call’ (Levinas 1985, p. 89). As Michael Morgan puts it, Levinas’s claim here is that the other’s face ‘addresses me and makes a demand upon me’ (Morgan 2010, p. 67).

Similarly, Eilan claims that there are two ingredients to any case where I experience another as taking an ‘attitude of address’ to me:

First, the adoption of an attitude of address, in the form of an expression or gesture, is immediately recognized, in a smile, a wave, a touch or a glance and enters as such into the experience one has of one’s co-attender. The second point is that the distinguishing feature of the capacity to experience an expression of address within the framework of a communicative exchange is that *its recognition entails experiencing it as an invitation, directed at oneself, to respond in kind.* (Eilan, Forthcoming A, p. 13, emphasis added)

This account seems to offer an explanation both of the intuition that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact and of the intuition that it is an engaged relation. It suggests that what is missing in situations of symmetrical covert attention is the way in which, in eye contact, each subject takes up an attitude of address towards the other. And, since experiencing another’s act of address seems to involve experiencing it as making a demand upon one to respond in kind, it would arguably capture the way in which eye contact is a practically engaged relation. In the last chapter I quoted Korsgaard’s observation that, when someone addresses you this has an immediate impact upon your will. She says that ‘[n]ow you cannot proceed as you did before...if you walk on, you will be ignoring and slighting me. It will probably be difficult for you, and you will have to muster a certain active resistance, a sense of rebellion’ (Korsgaard 1996, p. 140). Similarly when I see someone looking at me, I experience them in a way that calls for, demands, or invites, a response on my part. I am free to respond in this or that way, but I am not free not to respond at all.



However, the idea that I'm addressed by the other's gaze when we make eye contact is too strong. When I make eye contact with another, I do not thereby experience them as literally inviting me to respond to them. Infants of around nine months of age are able to establish this form of connection, though they are not able to perform the speech acts of inviting (nor those of commanding or demanding). In order to perform an illocutionary act of this sort, I must understand myself to be doing so and must therefore possess the concept of the relevant illocutionary act. These infants, however, fail to meet this condition because they have not yet developed a grasp of language or the conventions that make speech acts possible. They cannot invite because they lack the concept of 'inviting'. Rather than understanding these descriptions of the other's gaze as 'demanding', 'inviting' or 'commanding' as performances of illocutionary acts, then, we should understand them as being used metaphorically, to describe some aspect of the experience of making eye contact with another person.

#### *4.3. Communication as connection*

A more defensible version of 'The Communication Claim' would be to understand the relevant notion of communication more generally, in such a way that the protoconversations of early infancy and the full-blooded linguistic conversations of maturity are instances of communication, without assimilating the form of intentional interactions characteristic of the former to the exchange of speech acts characteristic of the latter. This is important, since, after all, the form of connection established through eye contact which enables protoconversation and joint attention is itself a developmental precondition for the development of human linguistic capacities (see Reddy 2008; Tomasello 2019).

One strand in Eilan's discussion suggests a way forward. She suggests that the relevant notion of communication she is seeking to articulate is more fundamental than communication understood as the exchange of information. Rather, she identifies the notion of 'communication-as-connection'. On this conception, to communicate is 'to be in touch, to connect, or to "commune" with another' (Eilan Forthcoming A, p. 13). A similar understanding of the basic form of interpersonal communication as a kind of connection in opposition to the understanding of communication as a form of exchange of information has been outlined by Taylor (2016). For each of these authors, the performance of illocutionary speech acts is an instance of this more general form of connection with another, insofar as our motive is not merely to convey some information — to tell someone something, for example — but also to share our awareness of something, to engage in a certain kind of connection (Taylor 2016, p. 56). This is why we tell each other stories, stories we have told one another countless times before: not merely to remind one another, but to bring these events to mind

with the aim of sharing our recollection of them.<sup>14</sup> This kind of connection, however, is more general and more fundamental than the exchange of speech acts: it can be established through eye contact, through the mutual expression of emotion, by sharing jokes, by singing, dancing, or playing music together.

That eye contact can be understood as a form of communication in this sense is more plausible than the idea that in eye contact each subject takes up an attitude of ‘address’ in the sense discussed in §4.2. However, until more is said, this sense of communication doesn’t provide explanation of the ‘mutual openness’ and ‘connection’ involved in eye contact but rather presupposes it. The motivation for understanding eye contact as a communicative relation is, in part, to provide a non-reductive explanation of its structure in such a way to explain why the relevant form of mutual openness is present in eye contact but not in covert attention. But even if this notion of interpersonal connection is a basic feature of our psychology, we need an explanation of why it is established through the forms of interaction described by Eilan (e.g. conversing, singing, dancing, and sharing jokes) but not through reciprocal covert attention, which is also a form of interpersonal interaction. The most obvious thing the former have in common which covert attention lacks is that they all involve a form of ‘mutual openness’ or ‘contact’ between subjects, but this is the very thing we are trying to explain. Instead we must look for some alternative explanation of this form of interpersonal connection.

## §5. Eye Contact as Mutual Transaction

### 5.1 *The Transactional Approach*

We can make progress in explaining the notions of ‘interpersonal contact’ and ‘communication-as-connection’ by reflecting on the aptness of these tactile metaphors. In particular, I will argue that they seem to suggest an account of eye contact grounded in transactional looks. Heron (1970, p. 243) astutely observed that eye contact is analogous to mutual touch insofar as ‘each person both gives and receives in the same act and receives moreover what the other person is giving’. When two individuals shake one another’s hands, they are *acting upon* one another and *being acted upon* by one another in a single transaction.

This suggests an account of eye contact which is grounded in transactional looks. This view consists of the following two claims:

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of joint reminiscence as a form of joint attention, see Hoerl and McCormack (2005).

- (i) When I experience myself as looked at by another, I am conscious of myself as being *acted upon* by them.
- (ii) When two subjects engage in eye contact, each subject acts upon the other and is being acted upon by them in a single primitive transaction.

As we saw in the last chapter, a version of (i) is defended by Sartre, who argues that when one is looked at by another, one is transformed from a pure subject (a being-for-itself) into an object (a being-in-itself) (Sartre 2018, p. 355-6). However, Sartre's defence of this claim is mired in his ontology, which few accept, and which precludes the possibility of acknowledging (ii). Sartre is therefore an error theorist about the form of intersubjective contact I am seeking to elucidate: either I 'freeze' the other into an object, or I am 'frozen' by them into an object. The account I offered of (i) in the preceding chapter has the advantage of being compatible with the form of mutual intersubjective experience involved in eye contact. Here, I will argue that, not only is it compatible with such an account, it provides a more satisfactory account of this mutual awareness over both The Reductive Approach and The Second Person Approach.

I elaborate each of these claims in the sections that follow.<sup>15</sup>

### 5.2. *The power of the gaze*

In Chapter One, I provided an account of (i): I argued that, when we experience another looking at us, we experience it as acting upon us, transforming our practical situation, and the manner of our bodily awareness and activity. It will be helpful to have this position in mind, so I will briefly recap it before providing an explanation of (ii) on its basis.

The transactional account outlined in the last chapter begins from the idea, familiar in the phenomenological tradition, that my awareness of the world is not that of a mere spectator. Rather, I am aware of myself as an embodied agent situated in a world that is given as having an immediate practical and affective significance for me, a world that is experienced as affording certain possibilities for action and passion. Importantly for present purposes, my awareness of myself, my body and my activity are interdependent with my awareness of the world so understood.<sup>16</sup>

As well as being embodied agents, we are also self-conscious social animals. We find ourselves in a world with others whose practical significance for us is not in question. When I apprehend another human being as such, they are not given as the kind of thing the presence of which I may or may not take an interest in, depending on whether I happen to

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<sup>15</sup> Rödl (2014) employs the notion of a transaction his account of I-thou thought. My appeal to transactions is more general than his in that I think eye contact is a form of interpersonal transaction more basic, ontologically and developmentally, than the notion of I-thou thinking.

<sup>16</sup> For references, see Chapter One footnote 20.

form a desire either way. Rather, other people are given in a way that has an immediate impact on my will and emotional comportment. And when I become conscious that I am the object of another's attention, I do not become conscious of this in a way that is practically neutral. Rather, the other's attention is experienced as acting upon me, transforming my practical situation, my consciousness of my body and my emotional comportment. I will now elaborate on each of these ways I can be affected by another's gaze.

First, I experience their gaze as restructuring my practical field, determining the situation from which I act, and doing so in such a way that their presence to me cannot be avoided. I *must* respond, because though I am free to choose among a variety of possibilities of response (to smile or frown at them, to ask 'what are *you* looking at?'), I'm not free to *simply* not to respond at all. Anything I do will constitute a response. Even if I studiously avoid their gaze or stare through them, this will constitute a response, a way of registering their presence which will involve sustained and self-conscious effort. As Korsgaard (1996, p. 140) puts it, I will have to muster a certain kind of active resistance to them. The possibilities that define my situation therefore determined by and oriented around the other who is watching me. It's in this sense that the face 'calls for' or 'demands' a response.

Second, this experience of a transformation of my practical situation is interdependent with a transformation of my awareness of my body. I am conscious of the other's gaze as necessitating a response from me, and since I care about the impression I make I become acutely aware of my body's natural expressiveness, its tendency to reveal aspects of my mental life that I want to keep hidden, such as my feeling of embarrassment or self-consciousness before them. When I experience another as looking at me, I therefore become aware of my body (particularly my face) as being *exposed* to their gaze, as being prone to thwart my will, presenting me in a way at odds with the impression I want to make on the other, and therefore as something to be controlled.

In addition to the points mentioned in the last chapter, we can draw attention to a third way in which I can be affected by another's gaze: the other's gaze can be experienced as transforming my emotional comportment. Because I typically want to make a certain kind of impression on others, when I experience the other's gaze as necessitating a response from me, I want to respond well. As a result, their attention is experienced as exerting a kind of pressure on me. A pressure, moreover, which is exacerbated by the fact the timing of my response matters as to the impression I make. If I am confident, I might be able to bear this pressure, but if I am not I will be overcome with self-consciousness. The other's gaze can have an emotional impact in other ways. Being looked at can be intimidating and invasive, it can lead to attraction, annoyance and aggression. Even coldness, in this context, is a way of being emotionally

comported towards another as opposed to an ‘emotional blank’ (Cavell 1969a, p. 264).

Each of these three points are aspects of the way in which I experience another’s gaze as *acting upon me*. It is essential to the non-reductive account I am offering that what the other is *doing to me* and what I am thereby *undergoing* are not understood as two constitutively independent events. Instead, they are to be understood as two aspects of an ontologically basic interpersonal transaction. There is phenomenological motivation for this, we cannot fully describe these ways in which I am being *affected* by the other’s gaze independently of my consciousness of the way the other’s gaze is acting upon me. In this respect, the experience of being looked at is analogous to touch. When I’m touched by another my *exteroceptive* awareness of the their hand as *acting upon me*, pressing against me, and my *interoceptive* awareness of my body as being acted upon, pressed against, are, as Martin (1992) astutely observes, two aspects of a single state of mind. This is not merely true of the *patient*, it is also true of the *agent*. We can adapt Anscombe’s famous claim that ‘I do what happens’ to make this point. What the other is *doing to me* and what is thereby *happening to me* are two aspects of a single, irreducible, practical relation (compare Ford 2014, p. 15).

### 5.3. Mutual transaction

Eye contact is not simply to be understood in terms of each subject acting upon the other in the way described above. This can hold true of the case in which Romeo and Juliet covertly attend to one another. In such a case, Romeo will be affected by Juliet’s gaze and Juliet by Romeo’s gaze, but they will not experience the form of mutual awareness characteristic of eye contact. Indeed, this might be the very thing they are trying to avoid (if they feel self-conscious, for example).

(ii) explains what is missing in the covert attention case. In that case there are *two* transactions, one in which Romeo’s gaze acts upon Juliet and another in which Juliet’s gaze acts upon Romeo. This is analogous to a case in which Romeo grasps Juliet’s hand as Juliet uses her other hand to grasp Romeo’s other hand. Eye contact, however, is analogous to the case in which each grasps the hand which is, at the same time, grasping their hand. In this case, as Heron (1970, p. 243) points out, each subject gives and receives in the same act; each subject is both *agent* and *patient* in *one and the same transaction*. I will call this kind of transaction a ‘mutual transaction’. What each subject is doing to the other and suffering at the hands of the other can only be fully understood as an abstraction from the ontologically basic interaction which unites them. So when Romeo and Juliet make eye contact, each is acting upon another who, at the same time, is acting upon them. What each is *doing* to the other and *suffering* at the other’s hands, moreover, can only be understood as abstractions from an ontologically

fundamental transaction. This has three aspects, corresponding to the three aspects of the transformation described in §5.2.

First, just as the other's gaze re-orientates my practical situation and necessitates a response from me, so when we make eye contact, it is not as if we each determine the practical situation of the other while remaining in our own separate practical situation. Rather, we are now 'in it together'. We are in a single mutually determined practical situation, openly and self-consciously 'attuned' to one another, in a way that involves the mutual assimilation of our practical fields. This connection necessitates a form of communicative interaction, whether it be the peekaboos of infant protoconversation or the speech acts (or illocutionary looks) characteristic of mature adult communication. We might express emotion and thereby seek to make an impression on the other, by making faces or telling jokes. We can respond in any way we choose, but, as before, we cannot choose not to respond; we *must* do something. Think of how difficult it is to look into someone's eyes without responding to their efforts at communication. Just as a coldness is not itself an emotional blank, so maintaining an appearance of non-responsiveness while looking into another's eyes itself requires a great degree of effort, and must itself be understood as a kind of communicative response; one which involves intentionally and effortfully comporting oneself towards the other in response to their gaze, something which itself will necessitate a response on their part.

Whatever form this interaction takes, when we are making eye contact the fact we are doing so will be 'out in the open' between us: we are each looking into the eyes of the other, and holding their gaze over an interval (however short) in a way that is both visible and visibly intentional. Any communicative act (in the sense of the preceding paragraph) that is performed within this mutual practical situation will be out in the open in the sense that whoever performs it cannot deny that they performed it. If I look you in the eye and say *p*, then our mutual situation will leave no room for the possibility of straightforwardly looking you in the eye and outright denying that I said *p*. This 'mutual openness' is an ontologically basic phenomenon, and is therefore not reducible to our respective psychological states.

This brings us to the second aspect of the mutual transaction constitutive of eye contact. Since what occurs between us in this mutual situation is 'out in the open' between us, eye contact involves a kind of 'mutual exposure'. I noted earlier that another's gaze can transform my experience of my body, making me acutely aware of its propensity to reveal aspects of my experience that I would like to keep hidden from view. This is especially true of the eyes and the face. These are, after all, the most expressive parts of the human body; they are the means by which we make contact with the other and the place at which our reaction to the other is

most visible.<sup>17</sup> As such, the impact the other's gaze has upon me — whether it makes me excited, self-conscious or intimidated — is often itself revealed in my face and can thereby modify the way in which my gaze acts upon the other. Romeo is affected by Juliet's gaze when she is visibly self-conscious in response to his gaze in a way very different to the way he is affected by her gaze when she meets his gaze confidently. We can put this by saying that, during eye contact, my visible facial *expression* of my reaction to the other's gaze *eo ipso* modifies the *impression* my gaze makes upon them. This is the insight behind the metaphor of the eyes as a 'window to the soul'.

The other's gaze *acts upon me*, transforming my situation, but as with many acts the manner is altered by the emotion that it expresses. We apprehend another's gaze in a way that is affectively laden: it might be angry or aggressive, as when someone 'looks daggers' at me, it might be confident or self-conscious, or it might express sexual interest and arousal. This, in turn, will affect the way in which we are affected by their gaze: a self-conscious gaze might induce self-consciousness, a feeling of warmth and sympathy, or a feeling of contempt depending on one's character (and particularly, whether one is shy, confident or excessively arrogant)

This brings us to the third feature of eye contact understood as a primitive interpersonal transaction: it involves a kind of emotional *attunement* between each subject. When Romeo experiences Juliet's arousing gaze, for example, his aroused reaction to her gaze might be manifest in his facial reaction. When it is, Juliet will be able to see the impact of her gaze on Romeo in his expression, and when they are making eye contact, this will modify the manner in which Romeo's facial expression affects her emotional comportment towards Romeo. In eye contact, therefore, we can say that each subject's emotional comportment towards the other is interdependent with the other's emotional comportment towards them: the way each affects and is affected by the other is constitutively dependent on the way the other affects and is affected by them. Moreover, the emotional reaction of each will be 'out in the open' between them insofar as it is mutually perceptible. It is this mutual emotional exposure which makes eye contact so intimate, often so invasive, and therefore something which can take great effort to maintain.

This emotional attunement is most apparent when the emotional expressions of each subject are at their most visible and intense, as when two individuals are intimately staring into one another's eyes or aggressively staring one another down over a relatively prolonged interval. These cases draw attention to a form of emotional attunement which can arise even in the more fleeting episodes of eye contact in which each subject's emotional reaction is not as perceptible or as clearly defined. Such cases serve to initiate episodes of face to face interaction, as well as constituting the glue by which they are held together; these episodes of eye contact will result in

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<sup>17</sup> See Moran (2017, p. 95).

the manifestation of a certain kind of attunement between these subjects, whether it be one of friendly rapport or mutual awkwardness.

#### 5.4. *Advantages of The Transactional Approach*

This account has a number of advantages over the alternatives that I have discussed. Unlike The Reductive Approach, it is able to accommodate the form of intersubjective contact and mutual openness characteristic of eye contact. Unlike The Second Person Approach, it is able to explain this form of mutual awareness in terms of a form of interpersonal relation involved in the more basic, asymmetrical, experience of being looked at by another. These gazes enable subjects to participate also in *mutual* transactions. But mutual transactions, as we have just seen, are essentially mutual: I could not be in the state I am if the other was not also in that state with respect to me.

In the beginning, I presented each position as taking its cue from a certain kind of metaphor concerning eye contact. I have argued that tactile metaphors associated with mutual touch are especially revealing when it comes to understanding the structure of eye contact. However, this account has also appealed to the other metaphors. It makes room for the fact that I ‘see myself reflected in the eyes of another’ insofar as I see the impact of my gaze as manifested in their visible facial reaction to me. It is essential to the way we are affected in eye contact that our reactions to the other are *revealed* in our faces, thereby modifying the *manner* in which my gaze acts upon others. If my face did not reveal my reactions to the other in this way, it is unlikely that it would act on others in the way it does; nor is it likely that eye contact would be as difficult to maintain as it is. So the claim is not that transactions are, in a certain way, more *fundamental* than revelations, understood independently of transactions. Rather, it is that we cannot fully understand the experience of these revelations without understanding their transactional aspect and vice-versa. As for the metaphor of another’s gaze as ‘demanding a response’ or ‘making a claim’, I think this is a convenient way of describing the kind of interchanges involved when the other’s gaze necessitates a response from us, from the way in which the transformation of our respective practical situations makes certain possible responses salient to us. These kinds of interchange make possible more sophisticated forms of illocutionary transaction. And we are, in effect, projecting back onto the more basic phenomena aspects of the adult phenomena to elaborate its structure: since it is difficult to describe “pure” eye contact insofar as that experience, being as disruptive as it is, is inimical to careful attention and reflection. These metaphors, then, are useful for describing the dynamics of interaction in eye contact, but they do not provide an account of the fundamental structure of eye contact in its most basic form.



### 5.5. *Doing and suffering: redux*

In Chapter One §4.4, I observed that this account is committed to denying a reductive account of the relation between *patient* and *agent* which understands the agent's doing and the patient's undergoing as two unipolar events that are ontologically independent. There I argued that the feeling of self-consciousness, what the self-conscious person *is undergoing*, cannot be described or adequately understood independently of what the person before whom they are self-conscious is *doing to them* in attending to them. The same is true in the case of eye contact, though here the doings and sufferings of each agent are even more tightly woven, even less capable of separate description, than in the case of ordinary self-consciousness. Here we cannot describe what A is doing to B and what A is undergoing at B's hands without describing what B is doing to A and what B is undergoing at A's hands. These doings and sufferings are all aspects of an ontologically basic mutual transaction which holds A and B together. This is a special form of interconnection characteristic of human social life.

This account, therefore, bolsters the rejection of the reductive account of transactions suggested in the last chapter. If what I have said here is right, then it provides additional reason to reject an account like Davidson's, since it is unable to capture the particular form of basic interpersonal interaction involved in eye contact.<sup>18</sup>

## §6. Conclusion

If the foregoing is correct, then the notion of an interpersonal transaction introduced in Chapter One can be drawn upon to provide an account of eye contact that has significant advantages over both The Reductive Approach and The Second Person Approach. The experience of being looked at, and the experience of making eye contact with another are central features of human intersubjectivity. They play an important role in the experiences of shame and humiliation, and enable forms of triadic co-consciousness, such as shared visual perception and joint attention more

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted, however, that this is a commitment shared with The Second Person Approach. This is explicitly acknowledged by Rödl, for example, in the following passage:

Compare Aristotle's claim that one and the same act is the act of a passive capacity of one thing and the act of an active capacity of another thing; for example, the statement "the fire is heating the water" and "the water is being heated by the fire" describe one act. Analogously, one and the same act is an act of your active power to think second personally about me and an act of my active power to think second personally about you. (Rödl 2007, p. 190)

Similarly, Haase (2014, p. 122) observes: "The active and the passive are two sides of a single act that can be described from two directions: as X's informing Y or as Y's learning from X." And Thompson, echoing Aristotle, observes that 'the teaching is the learning' (Thompson 2012a, p. 239).

generally. Peacocke (2005, p. 316) observes that ‘the openness of linguistic communication should be seen as a special case of the philosophically prior and more general phenomenon of the openness of joint attention’. I would like to add: the openness of joint attention can be understood in terms of the special form of openness characteristic of eye contact that I have explained in this chapter. In any case, this will be one of the central claims on the following chapter.

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## The Significance of Sharing

Nothing will ever please me, no matter how excellent or beneficial, if I must retain the knowledge of it to myself. And if wisdom were given me under the express condition that it must be kept hidden and not uttered, I should refuse it. No good thing is pleasant to possess, without friends to share it. (Seneca, *Epistles*, vi ‘On Sharing Knowledge’, p. 27)

### §1. Introduction

I have two aims in this chapter. The first is to extend the transactional account of eye contact into an account of joint attention. In doing so, I will argue that this provides a more satisfactory account of joint attention than either The Reductive Approach or The Second Person Approach. My second aim will be to draw upon the notion of a certain kind of interpersonal connection established prototypically through joint attention to provide an elaboration of the Aristotelian idea that human life is characterised as a special form of shared life insofar as it is structured by a certain form of shared awareness with other human beings. This marks the conclusion of Part One and a transition towards the topics of moral psychology that I will be exploring in Part Two.

Aristotle thought that a characteristically human life is a special sort of shared life — a life that is in some sense lived with, or in common with, others. For human beings, to live with others is not simply to live in proximity or alongside others, like cattle which graze in the same pasture (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b10-13). Nor is it merely to live together in the sense of having some goal in common end in view as do ants or bees (*History of Animals*, 488a5-19). Humans live a life in common with others insofar as they live a life characterised by patterns of shared thought and shared perception: the most general way of putting this is to say that human life is characterised by a form of co-consciousness. This is, he suggests, ‘what living together would seem to mean in the case of man’ (*Nicomachean Ethics*, *ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> In this, he has been followed by a number of authors who have suggested that the special form of mutual awareness (or ‘openness’) found in human communication is a distinctive feature of human social life

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<sup>1</sup> See Kosman’s (2014b) excellent discussion of this in connection with Aristotle’s treatment of friendship.

(e.g. Peacocke 2005; Velleman 2013; Taylor 2016).<sup>2</sup> It is a noteworthy feature of human life that we seek to share our thoughts and experiences, not merely as a means to achieving some further ends but for the sake of the sharing in and of itself (see Carpenter 2011; Tomasello 2019). Kant (1963, p. 205) observes that when we share our thoughts and feelings, we ‘unburden our heart to another’ and the relief that this offers — the special sort of pleasure it constitutes — should not, on the face of it, be understood independently of the experience of sharing itself, whether through conversation or joint attention. Rather, the pleasant sense of ‘unburdening’ is most plausibly understood as intrinsic to, and therefore inseparable from, the sharing of an experience. This desire to share is not restricted to relations with our intimates: it is something we are often inclined to participate in with an acquaintance or a sympathetic stranger on a flight or train (Harcourt 2016, p. 109).

Consider the difference between visiting a city alone or with a friend. Though a solitary trip to New York City undoubtedly affords its own solitary pleasures (ruminative walks in Central Park, being able to eat wherever you want and to spend as much time as you want in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), most of us would find such an experience to be, in a sense that is easy to recognise but difficult to articulate, restrictive. Being unable to share one’s experiences with another in this way is felt as a frustration; the experience itself feels to be less than it could have been, as having a kind of unrealised potential (compare Julius 2016, p. 205). When we are unable to share our thoughts or experiences, we feel imprisoned in the subjectivity of our own singular experience.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps this is merely autobiography posing as philosophy. However, it seems clear to me that I am not alone in this. Consider the widespread tendency of spending a large portion of our time on trips of this sort describing our experiences, the thoughts we had and the things we saw, to friends, thousands of miles away. Even if we do not succumb to these urges immersing ourselves in the trip, we still might nevertheless feel a kind of frustration in not being able to share our experiences and stories upon our return. As Carpenter & Liebel (2011, pp. 175-6) observe, the strength of our motive to share experiences is reflected in the costs we are willing to bear on their behalf: we choose to act jointly with others in some task even when this means receiving a smaller share of the reward or incurring some cost to secure their participation (e.g., having to pay for their cinema ticket).

In certain moods, this drive to share experiences with others can seem puzzling. Why are we so interested in telling others about ourselves and our experiences? Why are we so eager to do things which could be done by ourselves in the company of others? A background worry here might be

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that this is unique to humans. Though there is something to be said for the idea that this form of mutual awareness is uniquely human, I do not wish to commit to that here.

<sup>3</sup> I have adapted this phrase from Arendt (1988, p. 58).

that both are traceable to defects of character, the first being a kind of narcissism and the second a failure of autonomy. Why is it that we pursue these forms of sharing for their own sake rather than for merely instrumental purposes? An understanding of these motives, of how these forms of sharing could so much as appear to be desirable for their own sake, is a *desideratum* on any adequate account of the way in which human life is a special form of shared life.

Another *desideratum* of such an account would be to make sense of the different ways in which we can share our experiences with others. After all, infants engage in protoconversational eye contact and joint attention with their caregivers; adults engage in conversations, and in forms of joint attention that are pervaded with language-use. These forms of interpersonal communication make truncated forms of sharing possible such as epistolary and email exchanges, text messages and so forth. Sharing occurs in so many different forms that some eyebrows might reasonably be raised in response to the suggestion that some informative general account can be given of the sense that human life is a shared life.

Order can be imposed on this subject-matter, in my view, by focusing on a particular form of shared experience in relation to which we can understand all other forms of shared experience (and sharing behaviour). The best candidate for this explanatorily basic role is joint attention. Peacocke (2005, p. 316) insightfully suggests that ‘the openness of linguistic communication should be seen as a special case of the philosophically prior and more general phenomenon of the openness of joint attention.’ As infants, we seek to engage others in shared experiences of some object which we find interesting. Like the more developmentally sophisticated forms of sharing behaviour, this is pursued for its own sake, even when doing so comes at some cost (Carpenter 2011; Hamann et al 2011). This capacity for shared attention to objects in the world is also a central basis for the development of our linguistic and cognitive capacities, including our ability to understand and communicate with other human beings (Bruner 1983; Hobson 2002; Tomasello 2014a, 2019). This all suggests that joint attention should be treated as the prototypical form of experiential sharing or, to borrow a phrase from Werner and Kaplan (1963, p. 44), as ‘the primordial sharing situation’ out of which all other forms of experiential sharing emerge.

Focusing on joint attention makes our task simpler in this respect, but it nevertheless remains far from straightforward. One issue is that there is widespread disagreement not only about the nature of joint attention and its role in human life but also how the term is used. According to an influential definition, joint attention consists of a triadic interaction in which two individuals coordinate attention to an object of shared interest (e.g. Bakeman & Adamson 1984). This can be taken in two ways. Some researchers focus on the idea that when two individuals are attending to the same thing, where at least one of the agents is doing something

intentionally to focus on the same thing as the other, such as following the other's gaze (e.g. Leavens and Racine 2009, p. 241). Other researchers focus more on the coordinative aspect of joint attention, arguing that attention to the same thing as one's partner is insufficient for joint attention. In addition, both partners must 'know together' that they are attending to the same thing (e.g. Hobson 2005; Tomasello 1995; Carpenter and Liebel 2011).

I mention this dispute only to flag that I will use the term 'joint attention' in the latter way, as referring to an experience, shared between two subjects who are attending to an object, not merely in proximity of one another, but in a way that they are mutually aware (or mutually know) that they are attending to this object together.<sup>4</sup> To delimit the phenomenon of joint attention in terms of 'mutual knowledge' itself poses problems, however, since infants of around nine to twelve months of age can engage in joint attention with a caregiver. This places significant limits on how we can understand the relevant form of 'mutual awareness' (e.g. Hobson 2005; Tomasello 1999, p. 109). As philosophers, we might feel inclined to think of this kind of knowledge in terms of propositional knowledge, possession of which presupposes a grasp of the cognitive capacities well beyond the ken of infants of this age, who arguably lack the ability to conceptualise another as a conscious subject engaging in a certain form of attention to an object. Hobson (2002, p. 63) rightly warns against over-interpretation of the kind of mutual awareness involved in joint attention. We should not presuppose that the relevant form of awareness is one in which the infant grasps the thought that another person has a mind and experiences of their own. Rather, we should view the infant as relating and reacting to their caregiver, in short, *engaging* with the other in certain ways. But they are not simply innate, non-conscious reflexes. Just as there is a form of shared awareness in the case of adult joint attention, so many (though not all) researchers allow that there is a form of shared non-conceptual awareness between parent and child. In order to understand the nature of joint attention, then, we must provide an account of the form of mutual awareness that this involves.

This chapter is structured as follows. In §2 I seek to specify further the topic of this chapter by providing some examples of the form of mutual openness involved in joint attention. Sections §3-4 consist of a review of the main alternatives to my account and their shortcomings. This discussion will be brief, as it mostly consists in an application of the arguments of the last chapter to the topic of joint attention. In §3, I will consider the best account of joint attention offered within the constraints of The Reductive Approach, that of Peacocke (2005). In §4, I will focus on anti-reductive views of joint attention, one which appeals to a notion of 'primitive co-

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<sup>4</sup> I am not alone in this. In understanding joint attention in broadly this way I follow Peacocke (2005; 2014), Campbell (2002, 2005, 2017, 2019) and Eilan (2005; Forthcoming A; Forthcoming B) and the work of philosophically-minded developmental psychologists, such as Peter and Jessica Hobson (see P. Hobson 2002; Hobson and Hobson 2011) and Reddy (2008; 2011).

presence' (Campbell 2005) and another which emphasises the idea that joint attention is a communicative relation (Carpenter & Liebel 2011; Eilan Forthcoming A).<sup>5</sup> This discussion will serve to bolster the case against the corresponding accounts of eye contact and to illustrate the attractions of the transactional account further by showing how it can be extended into an account of joint attention (§5). This will achieve my first aim of providing a transactional account of joint attention. In §6, I explain how this account of joint attention can provide a way of understanding the special way in which human life is characteristically a shared life, and how the form of interpersonal connection involved in joint attention relates to other forms of sharing behaviour, such as adult conversation.

## §2. Sharing attention and affectation

Imagine visiting the *Troy: Myth and Reality* exhibition at the British Museum. As you navigate the horde of tourists, museum staff and schoolchildren your attention is caught by a fifth century amphora. You are drawn in and absorbed by the scene it depicts: the slaying of the amazon queen Penthesilea by Achilles, and particularly the moment at which they both make in eye contact and fall in love. This scene absorbs your interest, becoming, as Ryle (1954, p. 143) put it, your whole world: you are only faintly aware of the presence of the people stood beside you and peering over your shoulders. Suppose that the person stood beside you puts their hand on your shoulder and casts you a friendly smile — it is an acquaintance, also out on their lunch break. After the usual niceties, you both turn to look at the object, perhaps sharing a comment or two on it. This comment is most typically expressed verbally, in adults at least. But it could also take the form of a non-verbal expression of emotion, in a smile or a grin. The important difference brought about by this interaction however is that you are both attending to the vase *together*. This is what makes joint attention different from two people attending to an object merely in the proximity of one another. In this situation the channels of communication are open, and the connection is maintained and enriched by the comments you each make about the object. We are inclined to describe these cases as involving some kind of shared awareness. Eilan (Forthcoming A, p. 2), for example, writes that: 'On some level of description you have a perceptual experience in common and are aware of that.'

This kind of joint experience can take two forms. Suppose that you expect your acquaintance, someone who has a keen interest in art, to share

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<sup>5</sup> Sections 3 and 4 are a reprisal of the general dialectic of the preceding chapter concerning The Reductive and Second Person approaches. I have two excuses for this somewhat lengthy repetition, the first being that it is of interest of seeing how the same puzzle re-emerges in the literature on joint attention, and the second being that some might be inclined to think that the preceding approaches, though unsatisfactory as accounts of eye contact, might be more defensible as accounts of joint attention.

your enthusiasm for the vase. You move through the exhibition together, attending to particular objects together, sharing looks and gestures, in such a way that establishes that you both feel the same. You both are not merely enjoying the exhibition in parallel, like cattle chewing the cud in close proximity, rather, you are both sharing an experience of enjoyment. For one's reaction to be a shared one, it needn't be the case that the totality of one's reaction is shared: for example, you might both share enjoyment, but your friend might feel a kind of excitement at seeing some landmark for the first time, whereas you feel a kind of worldly satisfaction in your familiarity with the locality in question. I will call this kind of experience one which involves a 'harmonious shared reaction.'

Contrast this with a case in which your expectation turns out to be misplaced. Your acquaintance finds these 'old pots' to be tedious and your expectation of a meeting of minds is met with a look of unimpressed boredom: they look at the vase and then look back to you, widen their eyes and sigh as an expression of boredom and mild regret at having spent money on this. In this case, unlike the first case, you are not sharing a joint reaction to the thing jointly experienced. I will call this kind of shared experience one which involves a 'disharmonious shared reaction'.

Eilan suggests that there is a sense in which there is a 'meeting of minds' in the first scenario, where you both in some sense *feel the same*, in a way that there is not in the second. In the second, in contrast with the first, you are both acutely aware of the tension in the interaction. The phrase 'sharing a reaction' can therefore be understood in a number of ways. First of all, it can be understood most strictly to refer to experiences in which each subject's response is entirely of the same kind: both feel excited or bored. Second, it can refer to experiences which, though there is some element of their reaction which is of the same kind, their total response is not the same though it may be complementary. These can both be understood as instances of 'harmonious shared experiences', the sharedness of which serves, as Goldie (2000, p. 193) observes, 'to enhance and deepen' each subject's emotional response, and to do so in a way that makes each subject's emotional response more pleasant than it otherwise would be. Third, and most generally, we can describe subjects as sharing a reaction when each subject's reaction to a jointly attended-to object or event is qualitatively dependent on the reaction of their co-attender. These forms of shared experience need not be complimentary in the sense of being harmonious. In the example mentioned above, you are forced to see the vases which you find wonderful 'through the eyes of' your friend who finds them boring. Commenting on this kind of case, Van den Berg writes:

We all know people in whose company we would prefer not to go shopping, not to visit a museum, not to look at a landscape, because we would like to keep these things undamaged. Just as we all know



people in whose company it is pleasant to take a walk because the objects encountered come to no harm. (Van den Berg 1972, p. 65)

It should be noted that if the experience is genuinely a shared one, the same can be said for the other person with whom one is jointly attending: they are forced to look at these vases through the eyes of one who finds it engaging. In some circumstances, this might liven-up the experience. By engaging in joint attention with you, they might come to see beauty in what they initially thought to be an uninteresting piece of furniture. In other cases it might simply make you both painfully aware of how little you have in common, of your very different ways of 'being in the world'. This brings out something obscured by the metaphor of 'seeing through the eyes of the other'. Each subject's experience is affected by the other, so neither sees it exactly as the other would see it by themselves, nor are they seeing it as the other is currently seeing it. Rather, each person's experience of the jointly attended to scene is altered by the other person's comportment to that scene: they are emotionally attuned to one another in their reactions, and their attunement can be experienced either as harmonious or as disharmonious.

This marks two distinctions, the first between attending in the proximity of another and joint attention; and the second between harmonious and disharmonious shared reactions to jointly attended-to objects. Shared attention is joint attention in the strict sense, and this can take two forms depending on the kind of shared reaction involved. Whether we can have shared attention without any kind of shared reaction will depend on whether we think human experience of the world is mediated by feeling. I will remain neutral on this question.<sup>6</sup>

How are we supposed to understand these different forms of shared experience involved in joint attention? There are two standard approaches to this question in the philosophical literature: The Reductive Approach and The Second Person Approach. I will argue that each of these approaches faces difficulties that a Transactional Approach can satisfactorily resolve.

### §3. The Reductive Approach

#### 3.1. *A reductive account of joint attention*

The Reductive Approach provides an influential way of thinking about joint attention as well as eye contact. It seeks to explain the kind of mutual awareness characteristic of joint attention in terms of the ontologically antecedent psychological states of each subject. Peacocke (2005) offers an account of joint attention as characterisable by the satisfaction of the following conditions:

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<sup>6</sup> The idea that our relation to the world is inherently involves a kind of affective attunement is defended by Heidegger. See, for example, Heidegger (1962, Division 1, V §29-30) and (1995, Part One, Chapter One, §17).

- (a)  $x$  and  $y$  are attending to  $o$
- (b)  $x$  and  $y$  are each aware that their attention in (a) has ‘mutual open-ended availability’
- (c)  $x$  and  $y$  are each aware that this whole complex state of awareness (a)-(c) exists.

To say that a state of affairs,  $s$ , has ‘mutual open-ended availability’ to two people means this:

Each perceives that the other perceives that  $s$  obtains; and if either is occurrently aware that the other is aware that he is aware...that  $s$  obtains, then the state of affairs of his being so occurrently aware is available to the other's occurrent awareness. (Peacocke 2005 p. 302; see also pp. 307-8)

The motivation for this appeal to mutual open-ended availability is to capture, in effect, the force of infinitary common knowledge. The reflexive condition (c) allows us to give a definition of joint attention in terms of the finite individual psychological states of two individuals.

As with Peacocke’s general account of interpersonal self-consciousness, this account has been criticised by philosophers and psychologists who think that the mutual openness of joint attention cannot be adequately described in terms of conditions (a)-(c). I will consider two more specific objections that have been offered to motivate this thought, the first of which emphasises the phenomenology of joint attention and the second of which focuses on the way joint attention can serve as the rational basis for a certain kind of co-ordinated attack.

### *3.2. The Phenomenology of Mutuality*

The phenomenological argument to which I appealed in §3.3 of the last chapter to motivate the thought that Peacocke’s account of interpersonal self-consciousness is unable to accommodate the mutual openness of eye contact also serves as an objection to Peacocke’s account of joint attention. Carpenter and Liebel, for example, write that:

it does not seem to us to be really joint in any meaningful way...in contrast to the typical “joint attentional triangle,” it is basically two individual perspectives that never meet in the middle: each participant just assesses the knowledge state of the other (she knows that I know...) individually...It is not knowing together; it is each knowing what the other knows at the same time, and that is not quite the same thing. (Carpenter and Liebel 2011, p. 166)

Substituting ‘awareness’ for ‘knowledge’ we can state this objection as follows. There is an aspect of the phenomenology of joint attention, something that is *shared* between both subjects, something which is lost when we try to reduce the relation of jointly attending to an object to the ontologically antecedent mental states of each subject. At each level of embedding we are left with two subjects, who are each in constitutively independent psychological states which have no intentional contents in common. They, therefore, do not ‘make contact’ with one another; there is no ‘contact’ between their respective states of attention. Carpenter & Liebel put this by saying that they have ‘two individual perspectives which never meet in the middle’ (ibid.). The issue here is not that there are two perspectives rather than one. After all the fact that each subject has their own perspective on the jointly attended-to object is a fact that must not be denied. Rather, the point is that each subject’s perspective seems to be constitutively dependent on a relation that is ‘shared’ between them and which is not duly acknowledged by The Reductive Approach.

In support of this claim, consider a variant of the example of §2 in which you are looking at the amphora and realise that your acquaintance is also, but rather than making attention contact (i.e. eye contact) and initiating an episode of joint attention, you begin engaging in ‘covert attention’, attending to him as he attends to the vase. Suppose, moreover, that he realises that you’re doing this and begins covertly attending to you as you attend to the vase. To make this a case of symmetrical interpersonal self-consciousness (as understood by Peacocke) we need only appeal to the further claims that you are aware that he is attending to you attending to the vase, and likewise, *mutatis mutandis*, for him. Each subject’s state of iterated awareness of the other’s awareness of them is achieved through covert attention, and yet, if we continue adding further levels of iterated awareness, we can meet the conditions described in (a)-(c). If this is right, then the mutual openness of joint attention cannot be captured by an account of joint attention in terms of these conditions.<sup>7</sup>

As Eilan (Forthcoming A) argues, this shows that The Reductive Approach is unable to capture the special kind of ‘meeting of minds’ — the way in which each subject is ‘in it together’ — characteristic of joint attention. In response to the claim that the reductive theorist can avoid this difficulty by appealing to yet further layers of iterated awareness, Eilan notes that the problem is not the potential for infinitely high layers of intentional content but rather with Peacocke’s characterisation of the base-level case as one which is the same in both symmetrical covert attention and genuine joint attention. The idea is that, in being committed to this, it fails to capture the base-level openness which holds between each subject in joint attention.

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<sup>7</sup>This is based on an example from Eilan (Forthcoming A). For related arguments Taylor (2016, p. 56) and Moran (2018, pp. 183-9).

### 3.3. *The puzzle of co-ordinated attack*

In a variety of papers Campbell has developed a related argument. Rather than resting his case on the intuitive difference between cases of reciprocal covert attention and joint attention, in a series of works Campbell argues that individualistic accounts of this sort are unable to provide a plausible response to what he calls ‘the puzzle of co-ordinated attack’.<sup>8</sup>

Imagine that we both have to make a co-ordinated attack on one of a number of different targets. If we attack together, the target will be destroyed and we will reap a significant, but limited, reward; if only one of us attacks, however, the result will be disastrous: we will both be detected and killed. According to Campbell, it seems possible that you and I could rationally achieve a successful coordinated attack. If, for example, a potential target comes onto the scene and you, catching my eye, say ‘That one!’ or make a facial gesture to the same effect, it seems evident that we could both rationally attack. But, Campbell asks, how could this be?

Suppose, for example, that we are in separate booths and have to communicate through a message which will only get through fifty percent of the time.<sup>9</sup> Now a target appears and I message you, ‘Lets attack the green one’: is it rational for you to attack? No, because you know that I don’t know whether my message got through. So if I am rational I won’t attack, and, since you know this, neither will you. Instead you might send me a message letting me know you got my message. But will that make it rational for you to fire? No, because you don’t know whether your message got through. And I know that you don’t know whether your message got through, so I don’t expect you to fire, and therefore I will not fire either. It seems no matter how many levels of iterated intentional content we appeal to, it will not be rational for us both to fire: what we seem to need is a form of infinitely iterated intentional contents.

Campbell thinks this is enough to show that we should not try and understand why it is rational to attack on the basis of our individualistically available states of awareness. His solution is simple: we should say that the three-place relation: ‘ $x$  and  $y$  are jointly attending to  $z$ ’ is a primitive social psychological relation that is capable of grounding rational action on the part of  $x$  and  $y$ . In particular, when  $x$  and  $y$  jointly identify  $o$  as the target, that can make it rational for both of them to fire at  $o$  even in a case where the reward is significant but limited and the penalty is disastrous.

Moreover, Campbell argues that this account provides a more satisfying explanation than The Reductive Approach since ‘mutually open-ended availability’ does not describe anything that an individual might appeal to in their reasoning in this kind of example — these iterative states being far too

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<sup>8</sup> See Campbell (2002), (2005), (2017) & (2019).

<sup>9</sup> As Campbell (2019, p. 223) writes, ‘The point of the booths and the imperfect communication apparatus is to allow us to be controlled and explicit in considering what knowledge is individualistically available to each of the people involved.’

complicated for most adults to formulate, especially in the course of action, as in the example we are considering. Nor, Campbell adds, is there any evidence to think that this might give the content of some non-conceptual state implemented in the brain. The best explanation of the rationality of co-ordinated attack, Campbell suggests, is that the rationality of the attack is grounded in this irreducible form of mutual openness present in joint attention but absent in the booths described above (Campbell 2019, p. 224). If this is right, The Reductive Approach to joint attention must be rejected.

#### **§4. Joint attention as a primitive relation**

##### *4.1. Primitive co-presence*

Consideration of the preceding arguments might incline one to treat joint attention, following Campbell (2005), as an irreducible interpersonal relation in virtue of which each subject has a kind of primitive presence to the other as a co-attender. Unless more is said, however, some might complain that the phenomenological advantages of this account are bought at the cost of the explanatory ambition of The Reductive Approach. The Reductive Approach, after all, promised to offer an explanation of the mutual awareness characteristic of joint attention in terms that are arguably better understood. To say no more than that this mutual awareness is what it is and is reducible to no other thing might therefore seem to leave us in a dialectical stalemate in which The Anti-Reductive Approach has the advantage over The Reductive Approach insofar as the latter faces phenomenological objections to which the former is immune, whereas The Reductive Approach as a programme promises to have greater explanatory power than The Anti-Reductive Approach if it can be made to deal with these phenomenological objections. Since I do not claim to have outright refuted the reductive approach, some might think that the moral of the preceding objections is that The Reductive Approach is incomplete and that, with some work, it might be made to avoid these difficulties outlined above.

The defender of a non-reductive approach can shift the dialectical balance in their favour by recognising that not all explanations must take the form of reductive explanations and that a non-reductive explanation of the phenomenological structure of the form of mutual awareness involved in joint attention can be provided. A non-reductive explanation can take the form of an answer to each of the following questions: (i) why is this form of mutual openness present in episodes of joint attention but not in episodes of reciprocal covert attention? And (ii) if joint attention is to be understood as an irreducible triadic relation between two subjects and an

object they are both jointly attending to, how is this related to eye contact which is understood, on this approach, as an irreducible dyadic relation?<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.2. *Joint attention as a communicative relation*

Some authors have sought to provide a non-reductive explanation of joint attention by claiming that joint attention is itself a communicative relation as opposed to a purely perceptual experience that is merely initiated by, and sandwiched in between, two episodes of communicative interaction.

Carpenter & Liebel (2011) outline an account of this kind. They propose that in order for the awareness in joint attention to be genuinely shared, ‘both partners need to actively and openly share it.’ They claim that ‘the easiest and surest way to share something with someone is via communication. Whether it is verbal communication (e.g. “Isn’t that great?!”) or just a meaningful, expressive look...does not matter’ (ibid. p. 167). According to Carpenter & Liebel (2011), it is not merely the case that joint attentional interactions are like conversations, but rather that ‘the sharing of attention in “true” joint attention involves conversation’ and that ‘the sharing of psychological states in general involves communication’ (ibid. p. 169). ‘Communication,’ they say, ‘turns a mutually experienced event into an interaction, into something truly joint’ (ibid. p. 168).

Carpenter and Liebel claim that the looks exchanged between an infant and caregiver in joint attention are communicative in a specific sense: they have the reference and attitude components of speech acts. That is, they have a ‘topic-comment’ structure involving: (1) directing an adult’s attention to some external event or entity and (2) expressing some psychological state with the aim that the adult will either recognise or share that psychological state.<sup>11</sup> They add:

These looks represent “real” communication (although, of course, it is very basic): they are intentional, they are referential, and they have content — they convey a message about the object or event (e.g., “Isn’t that great?!”). (Carpenter & Liebel 2011, p. 170)

The looks involved in joint attention can be divided into three categories: initiation looks, reference looks and sharing looks. Initiation looks are treated as an “invitation to interact”, which ‘signals the initiator’s communicative intention (“I’m trying to tell you something”/“This is for you”)’ (ibid. p. 170). Reference looks signal the object or event the infant wants to call attention to, signalling the initiator’s referential intention and they are typically accompanied by a point or a nod towards the object.

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<sup>10</sup> For expressions of the need for such an explanation, see Peacocke (2005), Eilan (Forthcoming A, 5, 10, 15-16) and Carpenter & Liebel (2011, p. 167).

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Liskowski, Carpenter & Tomasello (2007)

Finally, there are sharing looks, these are bi-directional and described as follows:

There is a lot packed into a sharing look. It is a confirmation or acknowledgement that attention is shared (“Yes, I see it too!”), as well as a comment on the just-established topic. It is in this comment that most of the communicative content of the look lies. The messages expressed in the comment can vary widely, but in the prototypical case the comment expresses an attitude about the referent that each partner hopes will be shared, in the sense of agreed with, by the other. Whether or not it is successful (since the participant’s attitudes might differ), this alignment of attitudes seems to be the goal of much joint attentional interaction. This attitude expressed is typically positive (This look is often accompanied by a smile) and can be glossed as something like ‘Wow, cool, huh?!’ if both participants happen to look at each other simultaneously, or depending on the precise timing of the sharing looks, something like the following (quick — almost simultaneously) conversation sequences:

[Initiator:] “Isn’t it great?!” [recipient]: “Yeah!”

or

[Recipient:] “Wow!” [initiator:] “yeah, cool, huh?!”

(Carpenter & Liebel 2011, pp. 171-2)

This account answers questions (i) & (ii) posed at the end of §4.1 in terms of what I called ‘illocutionary looks’ in the last chapter. The mutual awareness constitutive of joint attention is established by a specific kind of dyadic communicative interaction involving initiation, reference and sharing looks, and because these looks, like speech acts, are necessarily overt, they are absent in episodes of reciprocal covert attention.

This account raises two questions. First, in what way does an account of this structure provide an alternative to Peacocke’s rather than a supplementation of it? Second, is this account of the mutual openness of joint attention plausible?

The answer to the first question might seem to be ‘no’ if it is interpreted as simply as introducing a Gricean element into the reductive account. Grice analysed speaker-meaning of the form ‘X means that p’ as ‘X intends to produce in the addressee the belief that p by means of recognition of the intention to produce that belief’ (Grice 1957).<sup>12</sup> Since Carpenter and Liebel

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<sup>12</sup> There is a large literature on this topic (see, for example, Moore 2017). Grice himself reformulated his account in response to counterexamples (e.g. Grice 1969). For simplicity, I stick with Grice’s original formulation.

find The Reductive Approach unsatisfactory, this presumably is not what they have in mind. There is good reason for this, since these communicative intentions, which represent the mental states of others (including other's awareness of one's communicative intentions), seem to be well beyond the ken of 9-12 month old infants.

Eilan (Forthcoming A) suggests an alternative way of understanding this relation. She suggests that each co-attender stands in a primitive second personal communicative relation to the other, in which they each adopt an attitude of mutual address towards one another and thereby have a primitive form of you-awareness of one another. So, in a situation of joint attention, when one subject directs an initiation look towards the other, they are they attempting to stand in a relation of mutual address with the other, and, Eilan suggests, their adoption of an attitude of address is 'immediately recognized, in a smile, a wave, a touch or a glance and enters as such into the experience one has of one's co-attender.' (Eilan Forthcoming A, p. 13). In addition, she adds, 'the distinguishing feature of the capacity to experience an expression of address within the framework of a communicative exchange is that its recognition entails experiencing it *as an invitation, directed at oneself*, to respond in kind' (Eilan Forthcoming A, p. 13).

Does this suggestion avoid the charge of intellectualism? In order to recognise another's illocutionary act one must recognise the communicative intention with which it is done. In order to perform the relevant kind of communicative act, one must understand oneself to be doing so and think of the other as one is able to recognise this is what one is understanding oneself to be doing. This is the natural way to interpret the idea that initiation looks are to be understood as invitations. However, as I argued in the last chapter (§4.2), the idea that I am invited by the other's gaze in joint attention is too strong. Infants of around nine months of age are able to establish this form of connection, though they are not able to perform the speech acts of inviting. In order to perform an illocutionary act of this sort, they must understand themselves to be doing so and must therefore possess the concept of invitation. These infants, however, fail to meet this condition because they have not yet developed a grasp of language or the conventions that make speech acts possible. The most charitable way to interpret this talk of 'being invited to respond' to one's co-attenders gaze is metaphorical, since initiation looks resemble invitations insofar as they draw one's attention towards one's co-attender.

The same issue arises in connection with sharing looks. In certain circumstances a sharing look might take the form of an illocutionary act, for example, in an interaction between adults), but this does not seem to be true of the sharing looks which characterise the interaction of a young infant and their caregiver. It is therefore implausible to think that these infants are communicating comments which share the content of utterances such as 'wow, cool huh' or 'isn't this great?'. Eilan is aware of this problem:



Children as young as 12 months engage in episodes of joint attention, and there is every reason to hold that they lack the conceptual sophistication to think the kinds of thought content I have suggested gets communicated in joint attention...On the one hand, when we think of the adult participants, it is natural to express what is going on by appeal to the kinds of thought content I have been sketching. On the other, children at this age don't have the conceptual capacities for thinking such thoughts. This is a genuine difficulty, not unique to joint attention, of trying to strip away what the child can do on her own, independently of the input from the adult she is interacting with. (Eilan Forthcoming A, p. 16)

It is true that we are often inclined to describe the forms of protoconversational interaction between infant and caregiver by analogy with adult conversation — the term 'protoconversation' is an instance of this. These authors, however, seem to attribute to infants an ability to entertain thought-contents that are plausibly far beyond the ken of nine to twelve month old infants.

A way forward is suggested in Eilan's discussion of joint attention, where she argues that the form of communication involved in joint attention is more basic than that of the transmission of information. Instead, she appeals to the notion of 'communication-as-connection':

The sense of 'communication' we need for making good the Communication Claim is the etymologically older, and more diffuse notion, on which to communicate is to be in touch, to connect, or 'commune'. I label this notion 'communication-as-connection'. There are many ways of achieving connection — dancing or playing music together, holding a conversation (in the course of which one might exchange information), sharing a joke and so forth; and there is much to be learned about the nature of connection by investigating these different ways of achieving it. But however it is thus filled out, the proposal I want to have before us says that we should treat 'communication-as-connection' as a basic psychological concept, which cannot be reductively analyzed — one of the concepts, along with those of perception, belief and the like, that we should take as basic when explaining our engagement with the world, in this case the world of other persons. More specifically, it...is the notion we should appeal to when characterising the kind of communicative relation that underpins you-awareness. (Eilan Forthcoming A, p. 13)

However, Eilan faces a difficulty here. Either this form of communication is grounded in attitudes of mutual address, as she claims you-awareness is, or it grounds these attitudes. If the former is intended, then her account runs

into the worry of intellectualism I have just outlined. The latter therefore seems to provide a more charitable interpretation of Eilan's thought. 'Communication-as-connection' should be understood as a basic form of interpersonal relation that makes possible attitudes of mutual address. However, if this is correct then Eilan's account raises the following explanatory questions. First, what do all of these examples of communication-as-connection have in common which makes them count as instances of 'connection'? And second, how are we to understand the notion of 'connection' such that it arises in cases of joint attention but not between those who engage in reciprocal covert attention? The idea of a second-personal communicative relation modelled, as it is, on an illocutionary speech act, is of little help here. In the next section, I will argue that The Transactional Approach can provide us with an explanation of 'communication-as-connection' which can address these questions.

### §5. A transactional account of joint attention

This section is structured as follows. First, I will offer a brief restatement of the account of mutual gaze outlined in the last chapter (§5.1). Then I will draw on this to explain the forms of communicative looks which occur in the first nine months of infancy with reference to Tronick's 'still face paradigm' (§5.2). On this basis, I will explain the initiation, reference and sharing looks of joint attention, and outline an account of the phenomenological difference between solitary and joint attention (§5.3). Finally, I will illustrate how this provides an explanation of harmonious and disharmonious forms of emotional attunement (§5.4).

#### 5.1. Recap

In Chapter One, I argued that when I am conscious of myself as the object of another's gaze I experience the other as *acting upon me*, transforming my awareness of my practical situation, my body and my emotional compartment. In Chapter Two, this account was in turn extended to the experience of eye contact. On this view, eye contact is understood as a 'mutual transaction' in which each subject both *acts* and *is acted upon* by the other, and thereby stands in a 'mutually determined situation' with the other.

When two subjects make eye contact, the way in which each subject acts upon the other and thereby affects them with their gaze is altered by the way the other acts upon and affects the subject. A consequence of this, I argued, was that it is 'out in the open' or 'mutually manifest' to them that they stand in a mutual transaction of this sort; any communicative act, verbal or non-verbal, performed when subjects are connected in this way will also be 'out in the open' between them.

Eye contact also involves a form of emotional attunement which holds between both subjects. This is a product of the way each subject's

perceptible comportment towards the other modifies the way in which their gaze acts upon the other. Because, in a mutual transaction, the way each subject acts upon the other is interdependent with the way the other acts upon them, so too are their respective affective comportments towards one another. Each subject's emotional comportment to the other is therefore interdependent with the others' emotional comportment to them. In other words, each subject's affective reaction to the other is an aspect of an ontologically and explanatorily basic relation of interpersonal attunement. This emotional dependence is why direct and prolonged eye to eye contact can be described as a kind of 'mutual exposure'.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.2. *Eye contact and 'protoconversation'*

This account of eye contact was presented as an account of eye contact between adults, but it can be adapted to the case of infant-adult eye contact. This is different in a number of important ways. First, eye contact between infant and caregiver is typically held for much longer than would be comfortable in most cases of adult-adult eye contact (Stern 1977, Ch. 3). The discomfort associated with prolonged eye contact, which arises in part from the concern to come off well, does not arise here and only appears on the scene once the infant develops a certain level of self-awareness. How we get from the proto-conversations of infancy to this kind of mature eye contact is an important aspect of human development, but this will not be my topic here. Instead, my aim in this section is to show that the transactional account provides an account of infant-caregiver protoconversation which is more plausible than the illocutionary accounts of Carpenter & Liebel (2011) and Eilan (Forthcoming A).

My suggestion is that the infants and their caregivers are engaging in the form of emotional attunement introduced in Chapter Two (5.3) and briefly recapped in §5.1. In cases of this sort, each subject is trying to bring about changes in the emotional state of the other. The caregiver pulls a face and makes a sound ('peekaboo') and, as Stern (1977, p. 27) observes, in doing so they seek to 'engender delight' in the child. When they are successful and the child responds with excitement and delight, this will in turn determine how the child's attention affects the caregiver (this in turn will be visible in the caregiver's reaction to the child, and so forth).

As the infant matures, they become able to initiate as well as participate in these episodes of attunement. The nature and significance of this form of activity has been explored through Tronick's 'still-face' paradigm (see Tronick et al 1979). In an experiment, the caregiver is instructed to interact normally with their infant and then, on instruction from the experimenter, to look at the baby with a still, expressionless face. Videos of these experiments show the infant producing smiles and gestures aimed at re-engaging the mother, and when this fails, slumping back in despondency.

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<sup>13</sup> For a more thorough elaboration of these points, see Chapter Two §5.3.

When the caregiver re-engages, by smiling, looking at the baby, and so on, the baby begins to respond in kind, and they re-engage, exchanging expressions of emotion. Tronick describes this as a way of ‘mending the connection’ (Tronick 2005, *passim*; see also Eilan Forthcoming A).

We should understand these episodes of communication as episodes of mutual transaction. Because they are making eye contact, their respective states of attention are oriented around those of the other — they occupy a ‘mutual situation’, as I put it in Chapter Two — and by expressing their emotions in their facial reactions to the other’s facial reactions to them, they are intentionally seeking to make a certain kind of impression on the other. This impression, in turn, will itself modify the form of emotional attunement which holds between them both. This opens up a way of understanding the idea that, in these interactions, we see ourselves ‘reflected in the eyes of another’ (i.e. we see ourselves in the visible affective response we produce in the other). A similar thought seems to be suggested by Winnicott:

What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there. (Winnicott 1971, p. 151)

This cannot charitably be interpreted saying that the infant literally sees themselves, from the third person perspective of the other, or that they see their reflection in the eyes of the mother. These infants after all, do not pass the mirror test, so it is doubtful that they are in a position to think of themselves as an object among others in the world (Lewis 1995). Rather, this idea should be understood as consisting in the infant’s being able to apprehend the mother’s emotional condition as engaged reaction to their efforts to connect with her. Or, as Winnicott himself puts it, of the infant’s ‘getting back what they are giving’ (*ibid.*). This is exactly what does not happen in Tronick’s still face scenario — ‘they look and they do not see themselves’ (Winnicott, *ibid.*). This does not turn the situation into an asymmetrical one. They are still ‘in contact’, but there is an experienced tension: the infant is conscious of the mother as not being impacted by their efforts at emotional engagement. The form of distress we experience in these situations is inseparable from our apprehension of the other’s blank gaze (compare Chapter One §3.3), and there is little reason to doubt that this is also true of infants.

### *5.3. Joint attention*

This way of understanding these dyadic relations and their motivational significance can be extended to provide an account of the triadic relations characteristic of joint attention. I will begin by explaining how the account offered in the last section can make sense of the communicative looks characteristic of joint attention, and then I will explain how this affects our awareness of our mutual situation.

As Stern (1977, p. 27) observes, nothing captures our attention quite like a human face. This is especially true when the face in question is looking at us. Initiation looks, then, serve to capture another's attention towards us. As I have stressed in previous chapters, when we become aware that we are being looked at, this results in a transformation in our practical situation such that we become actively oriented around the other in such a way that we are necessitated to respond, either by engaging in some kind of communicative interaction with them or by actively ignoring them, which can itself be understood as a kind of communicative response. When, on this basis, eye contact is made, this establishes a mutual situation (as described in Chapter Two).

Initiation looks are typically followed by reference looks: these direct our attention — they are distinct from, but analogous to, the act of telling another to 'look at *that*'. Because we are actively oriented around the other's gaze, when they look at us and then over to some object, this naturally draws our attention towards that object. It might lead us to attend to this object, though even if we do so this will not yet count as a case of joint attention with the other. For genuine joint attention to occur, a sharing look is required.

Sharing looks are the most challenging looks to describe. As Carpenter & Liebel (2011) claim, sharing looks between two individuals establish that they are sharing attention (that the object and the fact they are jointly attending to it is in their 'common ground') and involve something analogous to a 'comment'. Importantly, they are only analogous to a comment. If we are to describe infants as performing sharing looks we must not understand them as literally performing the speech act of commenting, an act which aims at communicating a proposition. Rather, the 'comment' is to be understood as the expression of an emotional reaction directed towards the other, whether it be interest, curiosity, or excitement, fear, aversion or anger). However, this expression must not be understood as a mere revelation in the sense that it merely makes the other aware of their reaction. As I have said, this expression is also, when it occurs during an episode of eye contact, an *impression upon* the other, a way of affecting them, and thereby of modifying the way in which they affect one and the character of the emotional attunement which holds between both subjects. Some of these expressions will be intentionally directed towards the other with the aim of making an impression upon them in this sense, other expressions might be unintentional but will make an impression upon the other anyway. Both kinds of expression are important for joint attention,

but it is the former that has led many authors to think of it as an inherently communicative phenomenon. Joint attention can therefore be thought of as an ongoing emotional interchange which involves neither continuous eye contact nor continuous attention on the object, but rather an alternation between attention to the object and attention to one another.

Joint attention is more complex than eye contact in that each subject's emotional comportment is determined, not merely by the other's emotional comportment to them, but also by their respective reactions to their mutual practical situation. Just as eye contact creates a mutual situation in which each subject's comportment towards the other, along with any communicative acts they perform, is 'out in open' between them both, so when one subject turns and performs a reference look to some object or event, they apprehend the scene that is jointly attended to as affording opportunities for joint action and joint reaction (both harmonious and disharmonious). This is likely to take a very basic form in infants: the environment will be apprehended as affording opportunities for the kind of emotionally engaged 'protoconversation' described in §5.2. At this stage of development, these interactions take a more complicated form insofar as the infant apprehends their environment as affording opportunities to share their reaction with their caregiver, thereby enriching the forms of communicative interaction that they are capable of at this age.

That infants apprehend their environment as affording opportunities for sharing of this sort is highly plausible. However, for this account to succeed, it must be plausible that the relevant form of awareness of their possibilities is non-conceptual. On the face of it, however, there is little to rule this out: my awareness of an itch is non-conceptual, but my awareness of this itch is constituted, in part, by my awareness of it as 'calling for' me to scratch it. The possibility of scratching it becomes salient, though I do not need to possess the concept of 'scratching' to apprehend this possibility. This suggests that there is little reason, on the face of it, to doubt that in apprehending their environment with excitement and curiosity, infants apprehend interesting objects as affording (or 'calling for') episodes of protoconversational sharing. Indeed, this emphasis is an important aspect of Tronick's discussion of dyadic states of consciousness which goes out of view in Eilan's discussion of Tronick's work (see particularly Eilan Forthcoming A; cp. Tronick 2005).

The mutual situation of two adults who are jointly attending to something together will be significantly richer than an episode of joint attention with an infant. Two adults watching a couple arguing outside of a pub at 5pm might experience it as affording, perhaps 'calling for', opportunities for comment and conversation, or, if the argument mirrors issues which have also arisen in the relationship of these two subjects, they might experience it as affording a topic for conversation that it is to be avoided. Equally, these possibilities will be apprehended in a way that is determined by the form of harmonious or disharmonious sharing reaction

they are apprehended as affording: we might apprehend it as affording the possibility for conversation in a way that is coloured by whether it will constitute an episode of shared humour or, alternatively, mutual awkwardness or antagonism (I will say more about shared reactions in §5.4).

Joint attention can therefore be understood in terms of the account of mutual transactions outlined above, as involving a mutual assimilation of each subject's practical situation and emotional compoirtment. Each component of this transformation must be understood as an abstraction from the whole mutual transaction which occurs between them. This whole can be described as a fundamental form of being-with-another, a way of being-in-the-world-together.<sup>14</sup>

This transactional answer to the questions (i) and (ii) posed in §4.1 has a number of advantages. Most notable, for present purposes, is that, like the accounts offered by Campbell and Eilan, it respects the intuition that the mutual awareness characteristic of joint attention cannot be reduced to the ontologically antecedent psychological states of each subject. Like Peacocke's account, however, it is able to explain how this primitive mutual structure is related to the more basic experience of being looked at, in a way that is explanatory. However, this account does not take the form of a reductive analysis. If this is right, then the dialectical stalemate noted in §4.1 can be avoided: we can retain the natural thought that the form of mutual awareness is what it is and is reducible to no other thing, whilst providing a non-reductive explanation of its phenomenological structure.

#### *5.4 Harmonious and disharmonious shared responses*

I will now provide an account of the forms of harmonious and disharmonious shared reactions to jointly attended-to objects.

Our emotional attunement to the other takes a harmonious form when our respective reactions to our jointly attended situation (and one another) are complimentary, whether by being reactions of the same kind (e.g. humour, excitement or even horror) or reactions of distinct kinds which nevertheless complement one another in the sense that each subject's reaction affects the other in such a way that it enhances and deepens their emotional attunement to each other in a way that makes it more pleasant for each subject. Tronick (2005, p. 293) describes these experiences of harmonious connection as involving 'an experience of growth and exuberance, a sense of continuity, and a feeling of being in synch along with a sense of knowing the other's sense of the world.' These points echo Merleau-Ponty's thought that, in these forms of interaction I find a 'miraculous prolongation of my intentions...as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and the other person's are one

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<sup>14</sup> My transactional account can therefore be understood as a way of reconciling Sartre's Insight with Heidegger's (1962) notion of *mitsein*, though it would take more space than I have here to provide a satisfactory elaboration of this suggestion. My understanding of Heidegger is indebted to Haugeland (2013).

whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 412).

Through harmonious interchanges of this sort, each subject's awareness of their mutual practical situation is enriched. This point is well made by Leder in the following passage:

I am walking in the forest with a friend. As we stroll we point out various things to one another: the color of the leaves, a passing bird, the changing of the seasons. I adjust to my friend's pace and she to mine. I find myself enjoying things more and in a different way than when I had come alone...We are co-subjectivities, supplementing rather than truncating each other's possibilities. I come to see the forest not only through my own eyes but as the Other sees it. Via gestures and word descriptions she opens me up to things I did not previously perceive...My perspective upon the world is extended through hers. (Leder 1990, p. 94)

During these harmonious interchanges, I am conscious of myself as located in a joint practical situation with another that affords opportunities for joint action, conversation and shared emotion. I experience certain objects as calling for mutual contemplation and others as broaching topics better left avoided; and not only are things experienced as affording joint actions, but also joint reactions, such as shared laughter.<sup>15</sup>

Occupying a mutual situation with another can therefore make the world seem to be a richer and more exciting place than it appears to be when one is alone. Hiking with a naturalist can transform one's orientation towards the environment. When they help one to distinguish wild parsley from hemlock, and to identify garlic mustard, sweet gale and yarrow, they thereby enrich one's perceptual faculties, making one attuned to features of one's environment that would previously pass one by. One's orientation towards one's environment is thereby transformed: one becomes conscious of plants as affording new forms of action and emotional response — a walk in the forest becomes a potential opportunity for acquiring food, plants are experienced as a source of excitement in a way that they weren't prior to the experience of seeing 'it through the eyes of' another.

There is a negative side to all of this, however. We cannot simply ignore a co-attender's attitude and reactions. We are vulnerable to unpleasant, disharmonious forms of attunement in which we are 'out of sync' with one another: cases where our disparate emotional reactions make being emotionally attuned with one another a more unpleasant experience for each subject. Recall the observation from Van den Berg cited above:

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<sup>15</sup> My treatment of the ways in which a subject's practical situation can be enriched by the presence of another is indebted to Ratcliffe (2013).



We all know people in whose company we would prefer not to go shopping, not to visit a museum, not to look at a landscape, because we would like to keep these things undamaged. (van den Berg 1972, p. 65)

This kind of joint awareness can turn what would otherwise be a pleasant experience into an unpleasant one: we come to experience things we like as being vulnerable to a certain form of criticism, and this might ruin them for us (or at least might make the experience much less pleasant than it otherwise would have been). We might, for example, apprehend certain aspects of the things we are looking at (e.g. the 5th century amphora of §2) as prone to annoy the person we are jointly attending with. Montaigne, for example, writes that

there would be no pleasure in travelling through the heavens among those great immortal celestial bodies without the presence of a companion. Yet it remains better to be alone than in silly boring company. (Montaigne 2003, p. 1116)

We can understand why it is desirable to travel with a companion for its own sake. But also, why it is preferable to travel alone than with a certain kind of companion. This is not merely because one will have to join them on some of the foolish activities they want to do, but rather because being with them will permeate, and thereby ruin, one's experiences of the things that one actually wants to see.

### **§6. A shared life**

On the view I have been defending joint attention is an ontologically basic intersubjective relation which cannot be reduced to the ontologically antecedent states of each subject involved. Moreover, I have suggested that joint attention is the 'prototypical sharing situation'. By this I mean that it is the most fundamental form of joint awareness of the world, and that it can therefore serve as the explanatory basis for understanding the Aristotelian insight that human life is characteristically a life of shared thought, conversation and perception. In this section, I will provide a further elaboration of this idea.

It is through joint attention that we first develop our linguistic abilities.<sup>16</sup> The prototypical form of human conversation is a form of face to face interaction. These forms of face to face interaction are held together by short intervals of eye contact, episodes of joint attention and a variety of other communicative acts, both verbal and non-verbal. Adult conversations

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<sup>16</sup> See Bruner (1983) and Hobson (2002).

in particular involve a special kind of mutual openness. In any such conversation, when one person addresses another, it is a presupposition of the addressor's act that the addressee is in a position to understand both what they are saying and the illocutionary act they are thereby intending to perform. They therefore presume that what they are doing will be 'out in the open' between them, characterising the mutual situation that they stand in with one another. This involves the recognition that, in performing the relevant illocutionary act, they will be taking up a stance in the conversation and thereby incurring a kind of responsibility and accountability (to the other) for what they have said.<sup>17</sup> As with the experience of being looked at, moreover, each person's contribution to the conversation necessitates a kind of response from the person who is addressed. Depending on the speech act in question, one might respond by saying 'yes' or 'no', by developing the thought or by nodding; alternatively, it might involve actively ignoring the point or letting it fall to the ground.<sup>18</sup>

The account I have offered of eye contact and joint attention therefore provides a basis on which to understand face to face conversation. If face to face conversation is understood in this way, we should expect it to be irreducible to the individualistically intelligible acts and experiences of each subject. I will now briefly draw attention to two aspects of face to face conversation which support this claim.<sup>19</sup>

First, the mutual openness characteristic of face to face conversation, like the mutual openness characteristic of eye contact and joint attention, cannot be understood in terms of the ontologically antecedent psychological states of each subject. An argument of this form is provided by Moran (2018) on the basis of a case adapted from *Middlemarch*. In the original version, the ageing Dr Causabon is ill, and though he doesn't want to acknowledge his illness to his wife, he is curious to know how much she has learned about it through their mutual friend, Dr Lydgate. Eliot writes:

Dorothea told him that she had seen Lydgate, and recited the gist of her conversation with him about the Hospital. Mr. Casaubon did not question her further, but he felt sure that she had wished to know what had passed between Lydgate and himself. "She knows that I know," said the ever-restless voice within; but that increase of tacit knowledge only thrust further off any confidence between them. (Eliot 2003b, p. 414)

In this example, Causabon recognises that his illness is common knowledge between them: "[s]he knows that I know", he thinks to himself, and, as

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<sup>17</sup> For example, if I assert that p I can be criticised if I do not believe that p (or know that p, if knowledge is the norm of assertion — see Williamson 1996). For a more thorough treatment of conversation, see Moran (2018).

<sup>18</sup> See Moran (2018, Ch. 6.7, especially p. 186).

<sup>19</sup> A full discussion of this topic must be reserved for another occasion.

Eliot presents it, he reacts to this by resolving to avoid confiding in her. Moreover, appealing to further layers of iterated common knowledge — such as Dorothea’s knowledge that he knows, and his knowledge that Dorothea knows he knows — will not help. We can imagine an adapted version of this example in which Casaubon wants Dorothea to know both about the illness and his knowledge of her knowledge of the illness, perhaps because he wants her to feel sorry for him, even though he does not want to openly acknowledge his illness to her in conversation — he just wants her to know, somehow. Perhaps if Dorothea was an attentive mindreader, she might come to be aware of all of this; and Casaubon too might become aware of her awareness of this. And yet, Moran (following Eliot) suggests, the very *increase* in their tacit common knowledge is what further distances them from one another (Moran 2018, p. 170).

What is missing in this case is the kind of mutual openness and emotional attunement with one another constitutive of face to face interaction. If I am right, the most plausible way of understanding this openness is in terms of The Transactional Approach. If Casaubon were to openly come out and tell her about his illness, this will come to characterise their mutual situation. It will be out in the open between them, and will therefore constitute part of the ‘common ground’ in any conversation between them. In openly acknowledging his illness in this way, he would force Dorothea to respond to him in some way, perhaps with an expression of sympathy, or by talking to him about it, or by actively and awkwardly letting the subject slide. Engaging in conversation and joint attention, moreover, as we saw, involves a kind of emotional attunement with the other, and Casaubon, if he were to acknowledge his illness to Dorothea, would expose himself emotionally to her in a way which he characteristically does not want to. As it stands, this is a kind of emotional exposure to which Casaubon is averse, and this is why he would like, as Moran observes, ‘to install the correct belief in Dorothea’s mind’ without having her as ‘a conversational partner’ (ibid.). On this basis, we might therefore conclude, that the mutual openness characteristic of face to face conversation cannot be satisfactorily understood in terms of The Reductive Approach (for a similar argument, see Taylor 2016 p. 56).

Second, I mentioned earlier that things said in a face to face conversation alter and determine the practical situation of each subject. An important difference between thinking about a topic by oneself and thinking about it with another is that talking about something with another can arguably result in a richer object of thought than when one is merely thinking about it in private. This point is eloquently made by Kosman, who observes that in conversation,

there emerges between interlocutors a richer *object* of discourse; what they are talking about is enlarged and enriched by this synergy — the cooperative activity — of conversation, and the meaning of

each moment of the discourse is correspondingly amplified. I mean more by virtue of what we together mean; for my correspondent's meaning is in a sense my meaning. (Kosman 2014b, p. 179)

A testament to this fact is that it would take a great deal of effort for one interlocutor to reconstruct the process of mutual thought. It is not that there are two thinkers helping each other with their individual patterns of thought, but rather, a conversation involves two people *thinking together*.<sup>20</sup> A conversation understood as a form of joint activity cannot be reduced to the acts of each individual because each individual means more than either individual could in isolation. A similar point is true about the shared reactions of each interlocutor: the way in which each subject is affected by the conversational contributions of their interlocutor can only be understood from within a perspective of the conversation they are having. This is most clearly true of humour. It is implicit, for example, in the following passage of Bergson:

You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo...it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain....Our laughter is always the laughter of a group. It may perchance have happened to you, when seated in railway carriage or at *table d'hote*, to hear travellers relating to one another stories which must have been comic for them, for they laughed heartily. Had you been one of their company, you would have laughed like them; but, as you were not, you had no desire whatever to do so. (Bergson 1921, p. 5-6)

Thus we can see that the form of interpersonal engagement characteristic of face to face conversations can be understood on the basis of the transactional account of joint attention that I have offered.

However, conversation is not merely dependent on joint attention in a way that leaves our capacity for joint attention unaltered. Rather, conversation makes possible new forms of joint attention, such as joint reminiscence.<sup>21</sup> 'Joint reminiscence' is a vague term and can describe a number of importantly distinct phenomena. Most straightforwardly, it might involve recalling together some feature of our shared past where this is understood as some life-event we lived through together. These joint remembering typically take a narrative form, and are structured by what we consider to be salient, meaningful and evaluatively and emotionally significant (see Goldie 2012, Ch. 1). Through jointly reminiscing about our

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<sup>20</sup> This is also suggested by Korsgaard (1996, pp. 141-2).

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of joint reminiscence as a form of joint attention, see Hoerl and McCormack (2005).

shared past, we can engage in narrative thinking about our life together and thereby form joint narratives about our shared history. Establishing a joint narrative of this sort will therefore involve establishing a shared view about what is salient, meaningful and evaluatively significant about our shared past. What is included (and what is not included) from these narratives will therefore be a matter of great importance for each of us.<sup>22</sup>

These points explain why engaging in conversation with another is not merely desirable for instrumental purposes such as the acquisition of information, knowledge or further material goods. Conversation is itself a desirable form of interpersonal connection which we choose to engage in for its own intrinsic pleasures. This is why we talk to one another purely for the pleasure of engaging in uninformative episodes of joint reminiscence. With this in place we can therefore understand why, in addition to desiring to engage in episodes of joint attention with others, we also desire to talk about our solitary experiences with others. This provides a way of sharing an experience which we were not able to share at the time (or which we did not wish to share at the time). Talking about these experiences enables us to achieve further forms of connection with others, through joint attention and conversation, and these forms of connection can in turn enable us to come to a richer view of ourselves and our lives, by ‘seeing them through the eyes of another’. Throughout the rest of this thesis, I will refer to harmonious shared experiences, whether they be established through eye contact, joint attention, or conversation, as episodes of ‘communion’.

This understanding of communion provides an explanation of the notion of ‘communication-as-connection’ discussed by Eilan. Eilan suggested that this notion is a basic psychological phenomenon which can be achieved in a variety of ways, through playing music together, holding a conversation, joking around and so forth. What each of these activities has in common is that they are all ways of achieving communion, something which can only be achieved through eye contact, joint attention or face to face conversation (and therefore not through covert attention). Since The Transactional Approach is able to provide an explanation of these forms of communion in terms of the notion of a mutual transaction, it is able to answer the questions I posed at the end of §4 to Eilan’s account.

Human life can be understood as a characteristically shared life in that it is pervaded with the forms of co-consciousness that I have been describing in this chapter and those that preceded it, and insofar as human beings characteristically aim at forms of communion, whether through eye contact, joint attention or conversation, with others of their kind. If this is right, then interpersonal communion will be an important component of human flourishing, and a life which involves no opportunities for communion will

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<sup>22</sup> The place of joint narratives in human relationships is an interesting topic in need of further thought. This phenomenon will briefly re-emerge in my treatments of humiliation and shame, but a full treatment of it must be reserved for another occasion.

thereby be a deprived one. This is an important point which will play a role in my treatment of shame and humiliation in Part Two.

It is important to note, before concluding, that this view does not downplay either the way in which solitude can be desirable or the way in which a certain loneliness is endemic to the human condition. It is true that I have said little about these phenomena, though they are interesting and important. The reason for this, however, is that these phenomena can only be understood on the basis of an understanding of the way in which human life is a characteristically shared life. The solitude we typically desire is solitude of a distinctively human form — one which is a moment in a wider shared life, the fruits of which are themselves things that we tend to want to share with others. Thoreau might have longed for solitude, but in moving to Walden Pond he went, as Cavell (1981, p. 11) observes, only so far as to be seen by others more clearly. Similarly, the distinctive form of loneliness felt by human beings can only be understood against the background of our need for communion.

## §7. Conclusion

I have argued for an understanding of the human gaze and its role in human social life according to which, when we experience ourselves as being looked at by another, we experience ourselves as being acted upon by the other, transforming our practical situation, bodily self-consciousness and emotional comportment. This basic idea, outlined in Chapter One, has been extended to provide an account of eye contact and has culminated in the account of joint attention outlined in this chapter. Insofar as joint attention is the prototypical form of shared experience, this account provides a way of understanding the Aristotelian idea that human social life is distinctive in the way it involves a special form of shared perception, thought and conversation. On this basis, I have argued that humans characteristically desire to achieve a form of interpersonal ‘communion’ with others of their kind.

In this chapter I have raised questions not only about the nature of joint attention, but also its significance for us, its desirability and its relation to human flourishing. This chapter therefore marks a transition from the concerns of Part One — questions which would traditionally be located within the remit of the philosophy of mind, understood as a theoretical discipline — to topics that are more closely bound up with the questions of ethics that will be the focus of Part Two. It is to these topics that I now turn.

## **Part Two**

## Introduction (2)

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We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met ‘cut us dead,’ and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruellest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all. (James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Vol. 1), p. 294)

[T]here is open to man alone a source of pleasure, and of pain as well, a source that gives him an excessive amount of trouble, in fact almost more than is given by all the others. I refer to ambition and the feeling of honour and shame, in plain words, what he thinks of other people’s opinion of him. (Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays* (Vol. 2), p. 294)

### §1. Living in the eyes of others

A distinctive feature of our nature as self-conscious social animals is what A. O. Lovejoy (1961) called our ‘approbativeness’. This refers to the characteristically human desire to figure in the minds of other human beings in a particular kind of way: we want others to notice, take interest in, admire, respect and love us (these are our ‘approbative desires’). Humans, unlike other animals, do not seek simply to fare well in their ‘outward’ doings, maintaining and reproducing themselves in the way characteristic of their species. We also seek a certain kind of standing in the minds of others of our kind, pursuing this standing often for its own sake, as an end in itself rather than as a mere means to faring well in nature (understood here in terms of one’s outward doings and sufferings).<sup>1</sup> The hold that these desires have on us is most evident in the emotions which are intimately connected with their satisfaction and frustration, those of pride, shame, embarrassment and humiliation (these are our ‘approbative emotions’). How are we to understand the form of interpersonal self-consciousness characteristic of the approbative desires and emotions? And how are we to understand their proper place in human social life (and particularly human ethical life)?

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<sup>1</sup> This is a preliminary characterisation offered in order to raise some of the questions philosophers have raised about human approbativeness in a broadly Cartesian context. I have therefore taken liberties with distinctions between ‘inner’ versus ‘outer’ and ‘faring well in nature’ versus ‘faring well in the minds of others’, notions which will be disposed of in my treatments of humiliation and shame.



A common way of thinking about these desires and feelings throughout the history of philosophy has it that they are concerned with appearances in the mind of another. Recall the passage from Plato's *Alcibiades* quoted earlier in which Socrates draws attention to the way we can see ourselves as reflected in the eyes of another (132d-133a). Equally, we 'see ourselves through the eyes of another', in a metaphorical way, when we become aware of the other's awareness of us, seeing ourselves as we must appear to them, in terms of their standards, values and ideals. Throughout history, philosophers have disagreed on whether we are actually aware of another's awareness of us, or whether we simply imagine or make a judgement about how we appear to the other in question, but they have tended to agree that these desires are desires to *appear* in a particular way to another and that the feelings of pride, shame and humiliation consist in an awareness of the way we appear to another.

## §2. Against approbateness

The approbative desires and emotions, understood in this way, have commonly been viewed with suspicion in the western philosophical tradition. Historically, there have been two kinds of critique of our approbative nature, one which aims to show that it is extrinsically bad for us and another which aims to show that even if our approbateness is extrinsically good for us, there is nevertheless something intrinsically wrong with it.

### 2.1. *Is approbateness extrinsically problematic?*

First, this suspicion can take the form of a doubt that the susceptibility to these feelings and emotions has more harmful consequences for human beings than it has benefits. Some philosophers, such as Schopenhauer (2015, p. 294), take an extreme position in this debate, claiming that our concern for good standing in the minds of others 'in a thousand different and often strange forms' becomes the goal of almost all of our efforts which go beyond the satisfaction of our mere physical needs, and that therefore, in desiring these things, our happiness becomes hostage to fortune and our peace of mind unachievable. It is easy enough to see strands of this attitude in the work of Rousseau, though his work manifests a deeper ambivalence to our approbateness than Schopenhauer, the latter of whom sees these feelings and emotions, in his characteristically pessimistic mode, as a blight on human life. At the other extreme philosophers like Burke, Mandeville and Voltaire see our approbateness as a force for our collective good, being the prime cause leading us to ethical action (Lovejoy 1961, p. 221). Our desire for fame and our fear of shame lead us to engage in labours beyond those required for physical sustenance, leading to progress in the arts and sciences, in wealth and the refinements of life — but, unlike

Schopenhauer and Rousseau, they judged these changes to be good for us (Lovejoy, *ibid.*). Others disagree with Schopenhauer even when it comes to individual wellbeing: the desire for good standing, though it leads to a state of war when unregulated, is instrumentally valuable for our own survival and reproduction. Being held in approbation is good, according to Hobbes, because whenever others think well of us we are ‘strengths united’ (Hobbes, 1994 p. 74).

If there is genuine question here about whether our extrinsic nature has consequences that makes us better or worse off all things considered it is an empirical one (and one that is difficult, if not impossible, to settle). In any case, much more would need to be said to suggest that it would repay sustained philosophical attention. Instead I will focus on the second critique, the philosophical interest of which is more clearly apparent.

## *2.2. Is approbateness intrinsically problematic?*

There are three interconnected lines of thought which have led philosophers to view the approbative desires and emotions as being intrinsically problematic in some respect, and therefore not befitting an autonomous rational agent.<sup>2</sup>

### *2.2.1. The superficiality of approbateness*

The first line of thought begins with the idea that the approbative desires and emotions are concerned with the opinions of others, and more generally with how one appears to others. With this thought in place, it is tempting to think that a rational agent will be concerned with what *is* — with how they actually are, with what is actually true and good — and will only concern themselves with mere appearances insofar as they are indicative of how things are or insofar as they constitute an obstacle or a useful means to the satisfaction of their other ends.

With regard to a case where one becomes aware that one is seen in a particular way by another, this line of thought can be specified as follows. A virtuous rational agent might be concerned with how they appear to others for three reasons. First, they might take these appearances into account insofar as they constitute evidence for how they (i.e the virtuous agent) are. Taking heed of the opinions of others, in this way, is important component in the acquisition of self-knowledge. Second, a virtuous agent might be concerned with how they appear to others insofar as this is the prudent thing to do. How one is seen by others will determine how one is likely to be treated by them. In an extreme case, being thought of poorly might result in ending up like the just man described by Glaucon in Plato’s

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<sup>2</sup> I do not think any of these lines of thought are decisive as stated. My purpose in providing them is not to provide a well-formulated critique of the approbative emotions, but rather to outline tempting lines of thought that have had some degree of historical influence, with the aim of motivating philosophical reflection about the nature and significance of these desires and emotions.

*Republic*, who is a paragon of justice and yet viewed by those in his milieu as a model of injustice. '[A] just person in such circumstances', Glaucon says, 'will be whipped, stretched on a rack, chained, blinded with fire, and, at the end, when he has suffered every kind of evil, he'll be impaled' (362b). Even in less extreme cases, however, how one is seen will determine how one is treated by others, something which is likely to have an impact upon whether one is able to achieve one's ends, especially ends which involve reliance on others to some extent. Third, a virtuous agent might think that it is intrinsically desirable to be thought well of by others, but merely insofar as this is an instance of a more general intrinsically desirable state of affairs, that of people having true beliefs and being subject to accurate appearances. This is not an approbative desire nor would it manifest in approbative emotions for two reasons. First, the approbative desires are essentially first-personal in the sense that they are desires that he, himself, appear well to others — there is nothing inherently first-personal about the desire for people in general to have true beliefs. Second, the object of approbative desires are desired because they appear to the agent to be good for them, whereas this desire for others to have true beliefs and be subject to accurate appearances is desired because it is good for others or good *simpliciter*. These reasons aside, however, the virtuous agent will not concern themselves with the way they appear to others. They will regard the ways in which they appear to others as having little self-standing value of their own. Any concern with how one appears beyond these reasons will be regarded as superficial or narcissistic. One who pursues good standing in the eyes of others for its own sake will be regarded by the virtuous agent as engaging in trifles in a way that is not fitting for an autonomous rational agent.<sup>3</sup>

What does this line of thought seek to establish? At most that the virtuous agent will not set much stock in the way that they appear to others, regarding such appearances as unimportant in the grand scale of things. This does not entail that they will not regard appearing this way or that as intrinsically good or desirable to some minimal extent. Consider good looks. One might think it is preferable, in and of itself, to look attractive rather than ugly, and yet nevertheless think that the pursuit of this good ought to play little role in one's deliberation because attractiveness is relatively unimportant. Similarly, one might think that the virtuous agent will think that respect, admiration and esteem are intrinsically good for their possessor and therefore prefer, on this basis, prefer to be respected, admired and

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<sup>3</sup> Williams characterises an associated suspicion with shame as follows:

In the scheme of Kantian oppositions, shame is on the bad side of all the lines. This is well brought out in its notorious association with the notion of losing or saving face. "Face" stands for appearance against reality and the outer versus the inner, so its values are superficial; I lose face or save it only in the eyes of others, so the values are heteronomous. (Williams 1993, pp. 77-78).

esteemed. This is contrasted with the thought that, bracketing the epistemic and instrumental reasons mentioned above, a virtuous agent will be indifferent when faced with the choice between a life of justice which is recognised as such or a life of justice in which one is thought unjust by their community.<sup>4</sup> Still, it might be said, this minimal preference will not play a substantial role in the virtuous agent's deliberations. The virtuous agent will act, not out of a consideration for how they will appear, but from their awareness of what they ought to do; they will not uncritically absorb the opinions of others into their self-conception, though they might give them the appropriate level of credence in their reflections about what is the case.

So far, this line of thought suggests that the approbative desires will be present to a minimal extent in the life of a virtuous agent, and will therefore only play a minor role (if any at all) in their practical reasoning. It does not show that approbateness is essentially vicious, but rather that it takes a vicious form only when it is excessive, as when one places too great a value on approbation or, what perhaps comes to the same thing, when one desires approbation even when it would not be merited. Nevertheless, this modest conclusion will entail that these approbative feelings and desires ought to have a much smaller place in human life than they in fact do in most of our lives. This claim can be bolstered by a further development of this line of thought. If approbation is a relatively unimportant good, why should we spend any time, energy or attention seeking it out when this time, energy and attention could be more productively spent cultivating virtue? This, after all, is a difficult, life-long task, one which will be better for us in the long run, and therefore one which arguably has a greater claim on our time, energy and attention. Marcus Aurelius expresses something like this idea in the following passage:

Don't waste the part of life that remains to you in representations concerning other people...Why do you deprive yourself of the opportunity of accomplishing another task...imagining what so-and-so is doing, why he is doing it, what he thinks, what he is plotting and all those other questions which make you dizzy inside and turn you away from the attention which you should be paying toward your own guiding principle. (*Meditations*, III, 4, I, quoted in Hadot 1998 p. 115)<sup>5</sup>

This suggests that approbateness and its associated feelings and desires will have a very minor role, if any, in the life of a virtuous agent. Any concern with appearances beyond the minimal form described above will be

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<sup>4</sup> The more radical thought that our standing in the minds of another is an 'indifferent', neither intrinsically desirable nor intrinsically undesirable, is a view that is championed by the stoics. I will discuss this view shortly.

<sup>5</sup> For arguments along these lines see Pascal (1996 p. 270), Lovejoy (1961, p. 236) and Neuhauser (2008, especially p. 87).

a sign of ethical immaturity — something appropriate for those who are learning to be good, but not for mature ethical agents.

This line of thought, as presented, is not watertight and involves a number of assumptions which might be questioned. However, it is fair to say that something resembling it has been found throughout the history of western philosophy. At the very least, this argument is sufficient to motivate reflection about the nature of approbateness and its place in human life. In any case, this line of thought is often paired two additional lines of thought, one concerning autonomy (§2.2.2) and another concerning wellbeing (§2.2.3).

### 2.2.2. *The heteronomy of approbateness*

According to a second line of thought, approbateness is intrinsically problematic because it involves a failure of autonomy. This is the charge that to be motivated to act out of a concern for approbation (or a fear of disapprobation, as with the fear of shame or embarrassment) is heteronomous insofar as the source of one's acts are 'outside of oneself'. Equally heteronomous, we might think, is the experience of being overcome with pride or shame in response to how one is seen by another, rather than how one takes oneself to be. A mature autonomous agent, on this view, is one who makes their own decisions about what to do and who judges for themselves. An autonomous agent might take the opinions of others into account in their theoretical and practical reasoning provided that these opinions are subjected to proper scrutiny in light of the agent's other beliefs and judgements. What this rules out is a slavish conformism in which one uncritically adopts or internalises the opinions of others in one's beliefs and acts rather than forming one's own reasoned stance on the matter at hand. In mindlessly accepting the opinions of another, or internalizing another's conception of one into one's own self-conception when one feels ashamed, one 'sees with other mens' eyes' (Locke, *Essay*, Book I.VI.23) and gets 'the taste of things from other men's mouths' (Lucretius 1978, p. 206)

When one acts with the aim of acquiring approbation, where this is unconnected with what one judges to be good, then, the thought goes, one fails to take responsibility for one's beliefs, feelings, desires and actions; these attitudes are therefore, to this extent, not 'one's own', and insofar as one's mental life is characterised by this kind of heteronomy one lacks 'a mind of one's own' (see Lovejoy 1961, p. 264; Neuhaus 2008, p. 80). Considerations such as these might make tempting the idea that allowing one's life to be governed by the approbative desires and feelings constitutes a spineless failure of autonomy. As Rousseau (1997, p. 187) observes, insofar as social man is governed by such feelings he is 'outside himself... living only in the opinions of others.'

To be autonomous, by contrast, is to be the source of one's own actions. What this comes to will depend on our understanding of what counts as

‘ourselves’. The rhetoric of autonomy and heteronomy is Kantian. However, it should be remembered that Kant holds an extreme view about what counts as ours — any action which has its source not in the moral law would count as heteronomous for Kant, since he denies that such motives are really one’s own in the relevant sense (see Kant 2012). An alternative line of thought can be found in a certain reading of Aristotle’s remarks on honour. Aristotle writes of the magnanimous person that ‘he must...care more for truth than for what people will think...he must be unable to make his life revolve round another... for this is slavish’ (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1124b25-1125a1). This can be taken along with Aristotle’s argument that the life of honour cannot be the highest life, since ‘it seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honour rather than on him who receives it’ (ibid. 1095a20-25). One might then suggest that if one is motivated by pride or shame one’s ends are determined by the attitude of others, and therefore one is to that extent ‘slavish’ (or heteronomous). We might therefore think that approbateness ought to have no place in the life of a mature agent: it ‘is not becoming to every age, but only to youth’ (ibid. 1128b15-20). A mature, well-brought up, person will avoid certain actions, not out of fear of others’ opinions, but because they are ignoble (see Burnyeat 1980, p. 79).<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2.3. *Approbateness and wellbeing*

The third line of thought against approbateness has it that we should not concern ourselves with the way we appear to others because appearing in a certain way to another is neither good nor bad for us. Rather, approbation is what the stoics would have called an ‘indifferent’, something which is neither good nor bad for us in itself. The stoics held a view of this sort, treating approbation as an indifferent. However, the source of this view was not grounded in anything specific to reputation understood as an external good. Rather, it fell out of their more general view that anything which is constitutively independent of the good will is, in itself, indifferent.<sup>7</sup>

Even if we reject the stoic view and judge that bodily goods such as good looks, though they are external to our will and therefore depend to some extent on chance, can nevertheless be an intrinsic contribution to our wellbeing, we might nevertheless deny that this is so when it comes to approbation, the various ways in which are seen by others. Thus, Rousseau asks: ‘[w]hat does it matter to me if men want to see me other than as I am? Is the essence of my being in their looks?’ (Rousseau 1990, p. 252). The fact that another person sees me in such and such a way or thinks such and such about me is not my problem; it does not, in itself, constitute a harm to me. As a mere appearance or opinion in the mind of another, it is external to my being. It might lead others to hurt me or to frustrate my desires, but, in

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<sup>6</sup> The association of heteronomy and immaturity is also found in Kant (1996).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the passage from Marcus Aurelius cited in §2.2.1 and Epictetus (*Discourses* e.g. 1.24.6-7, 3.24.68-69, and 1.29.10) and Kamtekar (1998)

and of itself, it will leave me untouched. That another has a false opinion of me is bad for them insofar as having false opinions is bad for people, but it is not bad for me.<sup>8</sup>

### *2.3. The internal division of human nature*

As stated, none of these arguments is decisive: each makes substantial, and contestable, assumptions. Nevertheless, each of these lines of thought does characterise an important strand in philosophical thought about approbation. These suspicions are associated with a specific view of the relationship between our rational nature on the one hand and our social nature on the other. This view can roughly be characterised as follows. Insofar as we are self-conscious social animals we are subject to the approbative feelings and desires. But because we are self-conscious rational animals we are able to step back from our instinctual desires and feelings and, in doing so, call them into question. For example, we can ask whether esteem, honour or recognition really are desirable for their own sake, and whether they are so in such a way as to make our susceptibility to pride, shame and humiliation appropriate. If some version of the preceding arguments are sound, then we ought to judge that good standing in the minds of others is not desirable for its own sake but only instrumentally. But then the approbative emotions and desires do not befit an autonomous rational agent.

This in turn motivates a conception of our nature as internally divided: our self-conscious social nature pulls us in one direction and our self-conscious rational nature pulls us in another. The resulting picture is one of ambivalence: we think we should not desire approbation and we might, on this basis, try and train ourselves out of the tendency to have approbative desires and feelings as much as is possible. But on the reasonable assumption that any attempt to do this will be difficult and, in any finite human life, incomplete, we are doomed to finding ourselves in conative and affective states which we are oriented towards approbation as if it was intrinsically valuable whilst judging that it is not. The resulting picture is one in which we are in conflict with ourselves.

Perhaps this is one way of understanding Tugendhat's suggestion that we 'are in a state of unease other animals do simply not know' (2016, p. xxv). The only way we could be at peace would be either to cease engaging in reflection on our approbative feelings — something which is impossible as long as we are self-conscious animals — or to somehow rid ourselves of them. This might motivate the phantasy of living as a non-human animal, which is sometimes expressed; a life untouched by the anxieties of human

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<sup>8</sup> This line of thought adds a layer to the sense in which these appearances are superficial: they cannot harm us, not even in a way that is 'skin-deep'. It is also worth noting that good looks and good standing are treated differently by this line of thought. If we assume that beauty is not 'projected' onto the world (e.g. Wiggins 1987, McDowell 1998a, and Kosman 2010), then having good looks, unlike receiving approbation, will be a genuine property of the subject and therefore can be understood as being good for them.

life. The alternative would be to eradicate our approbative desires and emotions, to become a sage as viewed by the hellenistic schools, as a god among men, wholly unaffected by the opinions of others and, to that extent, self-sufficient (Hadot 1995, p. 58). Human life, by contrast, is an uncomfortable compromise between mere animality and the divine, and in this respect can seem to be doomed to inner conflict. Undoubtedly many have viewed our nature in this way, but is such an interpretation of the human condition mandatory?

### §3. Outline of Part Two

Shame, humiliation and the approbative desires which are associated with them have, like the experience of being looked at, standardly been understood along the lines of The Reductive Approach. This seems true even of those who are critical of The Reductive Approach as it is applied to forms of mutual awareness such as joint attention or second person thought. Those who reject The Reductive Approach in favour of The Second Person approach tend to focus on the ways in which it fails to do justice to forms of mutual awareness such as second person thought and joint attention. The result of this focus has been that the question of whether The Reductive Approach provides an adequate account of the forms of interpersonal self-consciousness associated with shame or humiliation has been neglected. This neglect would be understandable if there was some reason to think that The Second Person Approach was the only alternative to The Reductive Approach. One can feel ashamed (or humiliated) before another's gaze without there being any form of mutual awareness between the subject and the observer. Indeed, we can feel ashamed even when we are alone and, as Darwall (2006, p. 72) observes, shame seems to inhibit second personal engagement insofar as it characteristically leads one to hide one's face and avoid social interaction. This suggests that not only does shame not consist in a second personal relation, but also that it actually inhibits second personal engagement. However, there is no good reason to think that The Second Person Approach is the only alternative to The Reductive Approach and, as we have seen in Part One, there is a viable, transactional, alternative.

In the next two chapters I will argue that The Reductive Approach as applied to humiliation and shame must be rejected. I argue that this approach leads to puzzles concerning the nature of these emotions and their proper place in human social life. In Chapter Four, I argue that it makes unintelligible the common idea that humiliation can constitute a harm to which we are specially vulnerable as self-conscious social animals. In Chapter Five, I argue that it is unable to provide a satisfactory account of the nature of shame and its proper role in human social life. In each of



these chapters, I argue The Transactional Approach outlined in Part One can provide a way out of these difficulties.

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## The Possibility of Humiliation

As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another and the idea of consideration had taken shape in their mind, everyone claimed a right to it, and one could no longer deprive anyone of it with impunity. From here arose the first duties of civility even among Savages, and from it any intentional wrong became an affront because, together with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt for his person, often more unbearable than the harm itself. (Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Part II.17, 166)

### §1. Introduction

#### 1.1. *The Preliminary Puzzle*

We are susceptible to a range of approbative desires and feelings unknown in the lives of other animals. These desires and feelings make what it is for a human life to go well distinctive in important ways and distinctively vulnerable in particular. For a human being to flourish, we tend to think, they must receive some kind of approbation from others, such as recognition or esteem; a life that is starved of approbation, a life in which one is held in contempt and subjected to repeated humiliation, is a deprived life (in this respect, at least). Because we have these needs, we engage in acts of self-presentation, comporting ourselves towards others in social contexts in order to make a desirable impression on others. When we are acknowledged as being as we present ourselves to be, when we are seen as we wish to be seen, we (typically) feel pride, joy or the simple pleasure of being understood. When we are not so acknowledged, when our efforts at self-presentation are undermined or disregarded, however, we are susceptible to feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation.

In this chapter, I will focus on humiliation — ‘that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with humans’ (Rorty 1989, p. 92). On the face of it, humiliation can be bad for us. It is a way of being related to by another that harms us in the perfectly ordinary sense that it is detrimental to our wellbeing, frustrating what would otherwise be a life (or period of a life) that is going well (in certain respects, at least). Of course, an episode of humiliation, though in itself a harm, might turn out to be good for me on the whole, ridding me of a delusion and thereby setting my life on track. But, even still, it is doubtful that we could understand this as an experience of humiliation if I did not feel it to be bad for me.

The idea that humiliation can be harmful is a familiar one in philosophy. To wound a person's social self, 'is to wound him', or so writes William James (1890, p. 294) and many philosophers have followed suit.<sup>1</sup> Honneth, for example, endorses the idea that the disrespect conveyed by an act of physical assault can constitute a 'wound' or 'injury' of its own, which is sometimes regarded as worse by the victim than the physical injury itself (Honneth 1992, Ch. 6; Honneth 1997, p. 23). In a similar vein, Margalit observes that:

[I]njury is much sooner forgotten than an insult. Mental scars last longer than physical scars, and the effects of insults and humiliation last longer than mere physical pain. (Margalit 2002, p. 117)

The infliction of such 'mental scars' are among the cruellest things one might do to someone. The harm of being tortured, for example, consists not only in the infliction of physical pain or damage, but also in the humiliation inflicted on the victim.<sup>2</sup> This is something also expressed by the victims and survivors of genocide. Consider this report from a survivor of the Rwanda genocide:

I do not think this will ever be over for me, to be despised for having Tutsi blood. I think of my parents who had always felt hunted in Ruhengeri. I feel a sort of shame at having to spend a lifetime feeling hunted, simply for being what I am. The very moment my eyelids shut on all this, I weep inside, out of grief and humiliation. (Hatzfeld 2005, p. 28)

The infliction of humiliation, however, can take less extreme forms which are not necessarily cruel or immoral — we need only think of the humiliation of rejection. Carlsson (2018), for example, has recently argued that there is a class of 'interpersonal injuries' which consist in being denied certain non-obligatory forms of recognition. There is an injury, for example, in the humiliation of not having one's love for another requited.

These metaphors — of humiliation as an 'injury', as a 'wound' which can leave a 'mental scar' — are compelling, but they invite elaboration. They seem apt insofar as they express the thought that humiliation is a way of being harmed analogous to the more tangible class of physical harms. But they are also of interest insofar as they can, upon further reflection, draw

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<sup>1</sup> Here is the complete sentence:

Properly speaking, *a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him* and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him. (James 1890, p. 294)

<sup>2</sup> For complimentary discussions of torture, see Kraut (2007, pp. 248-250), Scarry (1985, Ch. 1) and Shklar (1984, p. 37).

attention to a way in which the harmfulness of humiliation is puzzling. Physical injury, after all, involves the alteration of one's bodily condition for the worse. We can straightforwardly understand a class of 'mental harms' on this basis: injuries which involve the modification of one's mental capacities for the worse. The harm of being lobotomised, like a mere physical harm, is unproblematic in this respect; so too is the harmfulness of a condition like Alzheimer's Disease. The harm of humiliation, however, is importantly different from these mental and physical harms. The harm of humiliation does not consist in any physical change that I undergo at the hands of another. It seems to require that this way of being 'outwardly treated' at the hands of another reveals their conception of me, their 'contempt for my person' as Rousseau puts it in the epigraph to this chapter. But how can the way I appear to another harm me?

The works of Rousseau display an ambivalence about the idea that the revelation of another's conception of me can be genuinely bad for me. In the *Second Discourse*, he notes that this thought is characteristic of social man, but he describes it without endorsement, and later in life he seems to call it into question (in certain moods, at least):

What does it matter to me if men want to see me other than as I am? Is the essence of my being in their looks? If they mislead and deceive the following generations concerning me, why should that, too, matter to me? I won't be there to be the victim of their mistake. If they poison and change into evil everything useful that the desire for their happiness made me say and do, the damnation is theirs, not mine. (Rousseau, 1990 p. 252)<sup>3</sup>

Consider Rousseau's thought as translated into the language of the schoolyard: 'sticks and stones may break my bones but your words can never hurt me.' This mantra can be interpreted as expressing the thought that I should not care all that much about how other people see me, because the way we appear in the mind of another cannot harm us. The fact others are subject to beliefs or appearances that are, by my lights, inaccurate is their problem not mine, and it is therefore intrinsically bad for them not for me; it is my problem only insofar as being seen in this way will have further effects that are bad for me.<sup>4</sup>

Understood in this way, the person who makes this utterance seems to deny that humiliation can constitute a genuine harm. Yet, in any concrete social situation, the very singing of sticks and stones (and the directing of it *to* their oppressor) is liable to be seen as the revelation of the fact that the agent is hurt by the other person's words. Understood in this way, the

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion of Rousseau's views see Dent (1989), Neuhouser (2008) and Kolodny (2010).

<sup>4</sup> It is not plausible to reduce the harmfulness of humiliation to the harmfulness of humiliation's further effects if only because the most salient 'further effects' of humiliation is further episodes of humiliation. I elaborate on this point in §4.1.

contents of these utterances express a tempting line of thought which concludes that humiliation cannot constitute a genuine harm, and yet the utterances themselves seem to be motivated by the attempt to defend oneself against something one apprehends to be a genuine harm.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I will provide an account of humiliation and its place in social life in the face of two ways in which this problem — the problem of how humiliation could constitute a harm — emerges in the course of philosophical reflection on humiliation.

### *1.2. Outline*

I will begin this chapter by outlining several revealing examples of humiliation (§2). On this basis I will provide a characterisation of humiliation which treats it as being interestingly different from shame and embarrassment insofar as it constitutes an injury to one's self-respect and dignity. This idea leads to a puzzle if we take for granted a common understanding of self-respect and dignity, according to which they are inalienable features of a rational agent, features which therefore cannot be injured in any straightforward sense ('The Puzzle of Self-Respect'). In the face of this puzzle I suggest that we should understand the notions of self-respect and dignity as they figure in this definition differently, in such a way that humiliation can be understood as the deflation of one's social standing (§3). With understanding of humiliation in place, I turn to an elaboration of the structure of the experience of humiliation as a form of interpersonal self-consciousness. Insofar as this topic is addressed by philosophers, it tends to be understood in terms of The Reductive Approach. According to The Reductive Approach, the experience of humiliation can be understood in terms of the subject's awareness of another's state of awareness of the subject; and, moreover, each of these states of awareness can be understood independently of any irreducible relation holding between the humiliated subject and the person before whom they are humiliated. I argue that this understanding of humiliation leads to the re-emergence of a version of the preliminary puzzle ('The Puzzle of Humiliation'). A consequence of this is that The Reductive Approach is unable to provide a satisfactory understanding of the idea that humiliation can be bad for us (§4). In §5, I outline an alternative account of humiliation on the basis of The Transactional Approach. On this approach, the relation which holds between the humiliated person and the person before whom they are humiliated is understood as an irreducible interpersonal transaction. This enables the acknowledgement of the plausible thought that the relation of being humiliated by (or before) another is a harm, but one which cannot be described independently of the irreducible relation of being humiliated by (or before) another.

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<sup>5</sup> An analogue of this is present in Margalit's speculation, influenced by Nietzsche, that the stoic denial of the harmfulness of humiliation is itself a symptom of humiliation (see Margalit 1997, p. 26-7).

## §2. Humiliation: some examples

The experiences of shame, embarrassment and humiliation overlap and are undoubtedly related in interesting ways, but the fact we use different terms suggests that there is a point in doing so. In order to arrive at a satisfying description of what is distinctive of feeling humiliated, then, we must think about the ways in which experiences can be interestingly different from experiences of shame or embarrassment.

An explanation of these differences must begin with a consideration of some revealing examples of experiences of humiliation. In this section, I present several examples from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and the television series *The Wire*.

### 2.1. *Notes from Underground*

My first two examples come from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Dostoyevsky's narrator is a self-described 'mouseman', small and pathetic, he presents his life as a series of humiliations, many of which are sought out intentionally. In a pivotal scene in the novel, he observes a bar fight which ends with one combatant being thrown out of a window. 'At another time', he reflects, 'I would have been filled with loathing; but one of those moments came over me and I envied this chucked-out gentleman' (Dostoyevsky 1993, p. 49). He enters the tavern, out of the romantic fantasy that perhaps he too will get into a bar-fight and be thrown out of a window. But this fantasy of himself and his possibilities in life are, deflated:

From the very first I was brought up short there by a certain officer. I was standing beside the billiard table, blocking the way unwittingly, and he wanted to pass; he took me by the shoulders and silently — with no warning or explanation — moved me from where I stood to another place, and then passed by as if without noticing. I could have forgiven a beating but I simply could not forgive his moving me and in the end just not noticing. (ibid. p. 49)

But, we are told, 'this measly story could not end there.' The narrator recounts walking along Nevsky Prospekt, one of the busiest streets in St. Petersburg:

I by no means went strolling there, but experienced countless torments, humiliations, and raising of bile...I darted like an eel among the passers-by, in a most uncomely fashion, ceaselessly giving way now to generals, now to cavalry officers and hussars, now to ladies; in those moments I felt convulsive pains in my heart and hotness in my spine at the mere thought of the measliness of

my attire and the measliness and triteness of my daring little figure. This was a torment of torments, a ceaseless, unbearable humiliation from the thought, which would turn into a ceaseless and immediate sensation, of my being a fly before that whole world. (ibid., p. 52)

On these occasions he would frequently pass the officer he first encountered in the tavern scene. The narrator observes:

he, too, swerved out of the way before generals and persons of dignity, and he, too, slipped among them like an eel, but those of our sort, or even better than our sort, he simply crushed; he went straight at them as if there were an empty space before him, and on no occasion gave way to them. I revelled in my spite as I watched him, and...each time spitefully swerved out of his way. It tormented me that even in the street I simply could not be on an equal footing with him. "Why is it invariably you who swerve first?" ... "Well, then let it be equal as it is usually when men of delicacy meet: he can yield by half, and you by half, and so you will pass mutually respecting each other."(ibid, p. 53)

And when the narrator eventually, and unexpectedly, holds his own grounds he is ecstatic: 'I had achieved my purpose, preserved my dignity, yielded not a step and placed myself publicly on an equal social footing with him. I returned home perfectly avenged for everything.' (ibid, p. 55).

## 2.2. *Invisible Man*

Early in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator recounts a scene from his youth as a young black man in the American south. He is invited to give a speech on humility 'as the very essence of progress' at a gathering of his hometown's most respected (white) citizens. Upon his arrival, he discovers that it is the occasion of a battle royal, and is told that since he is present anyway, he might as well participate. During the Jim Crow era, these battle royals, which consisted of predominantly black participants for the amusement of a predominantly white audience, were common. The audience tended to view the proceedings as a comedy, an occasion to laugh at the blindfolded participants stumbling around and swinging their fists into the air. Ellison paints a picture of these events as being brutal and degrading. The narrator, who at that time considered himself superior to the other participants, envisioning himself as a young Booker T. Washington, feels ashamed of being lumped together with the others in the elevator, as if they were the same — he after all is there to give a speech, they are just the hired work. This is the first sign that the audience do not see him as he seems himself. The participants are then called up to the ring with a slur: the school superintendent (the person responsible for the

narrator's being there in the first place), shouts: 'Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines' (Ellison 1952, p. 18). The narrator tells us:

Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity. I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man. The smoke had become thicker and with each new blow it seemed to sear and further restrict my lungs. (ibid, p. 22)

The boys groped about like blind, cautious crabs crouching to protect their mid-sections, their heads pulled in short against their shoulders, their arms stretched nervously before them, with their fists testing the smoke-filled air like the knobbed feelers of hypersensitive snails. (ibid, p. 23)

After the battle royal, gold coins are poured onto an electric mat and the participants are made to scramble for the coins, which turn out to be fake. 'The men roared above us as we struggled', he recalls (ibid, p. 27). By the end, the audience almost forget that he is there to give a speech. Just before he is about to leave they remember and he is brought onstage, battered and bleeding, to give his speech. As he tries to speak they laugh and jeer at him.

### 2.3. *The Wire*

My fourth and final example is taken from an episode of David Simon's television series *The Wire*. Marlo, a West Baltimore gang-leader, enters a supermarket to buy a bottle of water, and as he's paying for it, makes eye contact with the security and steals some cheap confectionery. It is mutually manifest to each of them that Marlo could pay for it but that he's chosen not to, to provoke the security guard, and thereby to show him who is in charge. The security guard confronts Marlo and the following dialogue ensues.

SG: You think I dream of coming to work up in this shit on a Sunday morning, tell all my friends what a good job I've got? I'm working to support a family man.

[Marlo pretends he isn't there]

SG: Pretend that I ain't talking to you, pretend like I ain't on this earth. I know what you are, and I ain't stepping to, but I am a man; and you just clipped that shit and act like you don't even know I'm there

M: I don't.

SG: I'm here. Look I told you I ain't stepping to you. I ain't disrespecting you son.



M: You want it to be one way

SG: What?

M: But it's the other way.

### §3. What is Humiliation?

#### 3.1. Humiliation, Self-Respect and Human Dignity

A central feature of humiliation illustrated by each of these examples can be seen by returning to the passage from Simone Weil which I have discussed at various points in the preceding chapters:

Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone, that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out. If we step aside for a passer-by on the road, it is not the same thing as stepping aside to avoid a billboard. (Weil 2005, p. 187)

In this passage Weil evokes the way in which, when we encounter another human being, we experience them in a way utterly different from the way we experience other kinds of object. Other human beings are presented to us in a way that seems to constitute a 'check', as Dent (1989, p. 23) puts it, 'a "stop", a diminution, a modification, to their plans and actions.'

In each of the examples described above, the humiliated person is presented in such a way that this 'check' is not registered in the way the humiliated subject is treated by another. Regarding the tavern scene from *Notes from Underground*, it is tempting to say that the narrator might as well have been a piece of furniture to the officer, not someone who can insult him by refusing to let him past (and therefore as someone with whom he might get into a brawl). The narrator is seen as something that can be picked up and moved aside like a table or a chair. From the scene on Nevsky Prospekt, he is not even registered as a thing that must be picked up and moved aside but is 'invisible', an empty space which might be walked through. This is also the pretence of Marlo's comportment towards the security guard in *The Wire*: his presence is not registered in Marlo's actions. This sort of 'invisibility' is one of the central themes of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. But the example from that novel I have chosen brings to light a different way in which humiliation can involve the presentation of a person as a thing. What the audience are laughing at is precisely the reduction of another's activity into involuntary flailing that of a thing lacking in autonomy. As Bergson (1921, p. 29) claims, 'the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine' and elsewhere: 'that, therefore, incited

laughter was the momentary transformation of a person into a thing' (*ibid*, p. 57).

This preliminary line of thought, in turn, leads to the idea that humiliation consists in an attack on our dignity as human beings. This is in line with the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of humiliation, which defines humiliation as: to lower or depress someone's dignity or self-respect. Philosophers and psychologists, by and large, have followed the OED definition in this respect. Margalit (1997) defines humiliation as 'the feeling that one's self-respect is injured (*ibid*, p. 19) or, in the limiting case, lost (*ibid*, p. 115). Similarly Paul Gilbert (1997, p. 133), an evolutionary psychologist, suggests that when one is humiliated one is 'stripped of one's dignity'.

This definition provides an interesting explanation of the point in distinguishing humiliation from shame or embarrassment.

Insofar as embarrassment characteristically follows a social blunder, it is like humiliation in that it must be described with reference to an actual social event involving the embarrassed person and the person (or people) before whom they are embarrassed. Humiliation is unlike embarrassment however, in that the latter is relatively skin-deep — it does not bite one hard enough to undermine one's self-respect or one's dignity. Nor are mere embarrassments serious threats to one's social standing. Rather, mere embarrassments are relatively minor blunders which we can laugh about with others. By contrast, anyone who takes pleasure in being humiliated in the way many can take pleasure in their embarrassments would appear to be a kind of masochist (as indeed, Dostoyevsky's narrator seems to be).

Like embarrassment and humiliation, shame is a form of interpersonal self-consciousness. Shame is distinct from these experiences in that an experience of shame can be understood without reference to some actual (past or present) concrete social interaction. Shame is concerned with who (or what) one is, whereas embarrassment and humiliation are concerned with how one appears to others independently of whether one really is as one appears to be. When we embarrass or humiliate someone, we act upon them, putting them in an embarrassing or humiliating position they weren't already in. Shaming someone, in contrast, operates by making them aware of the shameful person they were all along, independently of the act of being shamed. This is why shame, unlike humiliation, is not experienced as an attack on oneself from the outside; rather, it is to have one's eyes opened, to become aware of how one always was. This is why the experience of shame also is not typically thought of as a harm whereas the experience of humiliation is.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This, however, is not to deny that persistent and inappropriate shame might be a bad way for a human to be. But this point is true of the persistent and inappropriate experience of any emotion. Consider, for example, the persistent and inappropriate experience of anger. Nor is it to deny that an act of shaming someone can be a way of harming them, it is only to deny that it is a harm in virtue of instilling shame in them. One can harm someone by shaming them, for example, insofar as one thereby humiliates them.

### 3.2. *The Puzzle of Self-Respect*

Understanding humiliation in terms of an injury to self-respect or dignity becomes puzzling if interpreted in terms of a common understanding of self-respect and dignity.

We typically recognise a distinction between self-respect and self-esteem. One can lack self-esteem, thinking of oneself as devoid of valuable properties that set one apart and make one worthy of the esteem of others. Despite this, one might nevertheless retain their self-respect insofar as they have a sense of their intrinsic worth as a human being. On this basis, one might consider certain forms of action and treatment at the hands of others to be beneath one.<sup>7</sup>

Understood in this way, self-respect consists in one's awareness of one's basic worth as a human being and in one's acting accordingly. This is in line with the most influential understanding of self-respect, that which is outlined by Kant in the *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant describes a form of respect which has as its object the moral law and all rational agents insofar as they are *loci* of the moral law (4:401). The moral law is experienced as compelling respect from us, both in itself, and insofar as we apprehend it as located in ourselves and others. Our nature as self-legislating rational agents, so understood, is the basis of our dignity (our 'absolute inner worth'). Self-respect, then, can refer to the respect one's own rational nature compels one to confer on oneself. Most importantly for present purposes, it is something we are entitled to insofar as we are the kind things that we are. This dignity, this absolute inner worth, is inalienable.

If self-respect and dignity are understood in this way, we might wonder how they could possibly be injured, attacked or undermined in the way that the OED definition of humiliation suggests. This constitutes the 'paradox of humiliation' that is considered at length by Margalit (1997). Following the OED, Margalit understands humiliation as consisting in an injury to one's self-respect, the latter of which he understands as 'the honor persons bestow upon themselves by virtue of their own humanity', honour which is 'based on traits of belonging rather than achievement' (Margalit 1997, p. 47). But this generates the puzzle: how could *this* be injured or lost as a consequence of the way I am treated by another? So understood, my dignity is an inalienable feature of my being: beat me, bruise me and chain me up, I will be in possession of my dignity as long as I continue to be the kind of thing that I am.

This issue is recognised by Darwall, who observes that '[f]ailing to recognise someone's dignity...may injure her in some way or other, but it cannot injure her dignity, at least not directly' (Darwall 2013, p. 16). But then what is injured? In a footnote, he suggests that the injury is to 'to the person's sense of his own dignity or his ability to rely on its being

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<sup>7</sup> See Sachs (1981). Though, as Sachs notes, this basic value as a human being might be grounds for a minimal kind of self-esteem. If so, then such a subject will not completely lack self-esteem.

recognized' (ibid. n. 11). If my dignity cannot be injured or lost, then how could my sense of my own dignity be undermined or lost? Once I recognise my inalienable dignity, how could I be made to doubt it on the basis of the way I'm treated by another? Could I forget it? But then any putative instance of humiliation would simply remind me of it: after all, people do not — because they cannot — go around humiliating things such as cattle, tables or chairs; things that have no claim to acknowledgement or respect can not be humiliated. Alternatively, if the injury is to one's 'ability to rely on its being recognised', we might once again wonder whether this is genuinely an injury to the subject at all. Their self-respect is intact, as is their sense of self-respect. Not being able to rely on receiving recognition from others cannot be understood as an injury without understanding how not being recognised could constitute an injury.

This illustrates something which ought to have seemed puzzling about the preliminary interpretation of my examples of humiliation at the beginning of §3.1. There I suggested that these examples of humiliation all involve the humiliated subject being treated in a way which suggests that the 'check to the will' characteristic of the experience of another human being as a human being is not recognised by the humiliator. More colloquially, we can say that the other does not recognise them 'as a human being'. Take, for example, this interpretation as it is applied to the example from *The Wire*. The pretence of Marlo's behaviour towards the security guard is that, to him, the security guard is not there; for all intents and purposes, the security guard is 'nothing' to Marlo. This, after all, is what Marlo says. But the fact he is saying it *to* the security, the fact he is behaving in this way precisely to provoke the security guard (looking him in the eye as he does so), shows that he recognises the security guard's presence and his humanity, in some sense at least. Similarly, presumably the reason why the audience of the battle royal as depicted by Ellison find the movements of the participants so funny is precisely that they are not things but human beings whose activity is made to, in some sense, resemble things. These are genuine questions which must be addressed by a satisfactory account of the phenomenon of 'dehumanisation', but for present purposes we can observe that they only generate a puzzle about humiliation on the assumption that we interpret the notion of dignity that is included in the dictionary definition of humiliation as the kind of inalienable dignity described by Kant.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation, however, is not mandatory (nor is the corresponding notion of self-respect). In the next section, I will suggest that the notions of 'dignity' and 'self-respect' as they occur in the OED definition can be understood as being able to have as their basis features other than one's intrinsic and inalienable worth as a human being. As a

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<sup>8</sup> This is not, however, the only notion of dignity or self-respect acknowledged by Kant. A notion of self-respect that is equivalent with self-esteem is employed throughout *The Doctrine of Virtue* (see Kant 2017).

result of this, we can understand these notions as being vulnerable to attack.<sup>9</sup>

### *3.3. Humiliation as the deflation of one's 'social stance'*

I will now suggest that we can understand humiliation as consisting in an attack on one's self-respect and one's dignity insofar as it consists in the deflation of one's social standing, where this social standing is expressive of one's 'practical identity'. Consider Rawls's definition of 'self-respect':

We may define self-respect...as having two aspects. First of all...it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfil one's intentions. (Rawls 1999, p. 386)

The first component of this definition — 'a person's sense of his own worth and his conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out' — is a complex phenomenon. It can be understood as including what Korsgaard (1996) calls one's 'practical identity'. Korsgaard describes the notion of a 'practical identity' as a description under which one values oneself, a description under which one finds one's life to be worth living and one's actions to be worth undertaking (ibid. p. 101). Our practical identities can be understood in terms of socially available and historically determinate categories. One might think of oneself as a student or teacher, someone's parent or child, a good friend, a member of a certain profession or vocation, a practitioner of a certain faith, and so forth. This is a complex matter and most people will have a variety of practical identities. Indeed, one central impetus to practical reflection is the question of how to bring all of one's practical identities together for one's life to form a unified whole. For the moment it is important to note that these identities impose teleological structure on one's life, providing it with direction and purpose. This is one way to understand Rawls's talk of a 'plan of life', though one which disavows the implication of explicit formulation suggested by that phrase — all we need is a rough sense of ourselves as engaged in certain projects which are moving forward towards some goal in terms of which one's day to day activities have purpose and meaning. Practical identities therefore, by encapsulating certain standards of excellence to be pursued, enable one to face life's possibilities in a certain kind of way. At minimum, the standard in question might be one of being good Muslim, a good doctor or a good father. In each of these instances one will have a rough

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<sup>9</sup> The availability of this response undermines the motive for the variety of substantive responses to the paradox Margalit considers. For a good critique of Margalit's discussion, see Bird (2010).

sense of one's long term goals and how they relate to the goods which one wishes to achieve through one's activities.

This sense of oneself as a certain kind of person with a certain kind of value encodes an understanding, not only of what it is appropriate for one to do but also what it is appropriate for one to undergo. This is important for present purposes because it includes one's understanding of how it is appropriate for one to treat others and to be treated by them in virtue of one's being the kind of person one takes oneself to be. A good Christian helps the poor, a good teacher helps their students, and a good student has a kind of deference for a good teacher. For Dostoyevsky's officer, this means showing deference to colonels and generals and expecting deference from privates and civilians; for Marlo it involves an expectation of deference from anyone who lives in the West Baltimore Projects. One's practical identity constitutes what William James calls one's 'code of honour'. As James observes, '[t]he thief must not steal from other thieves; the gambler must pay his gambling-debts, though he pay no other debts in the world' (James 1890, p. 295). Thus it grounds what Taylor (1985, p. 38) calls one's 'norms of expectation': one's expectation of how one will be treated by others, given one's understanding of oneself as a certain kind of person with a certain standing.

For present purposes, we can distinguish between self-esteem and self-respect roughly as follows. Self-esteem is the attitude of thinking highly of oneself on the basis of the kind of person one is, the properties one has (skills, looks, etc.) and the things one has achieved. The person who has high self-esteem is confident in their abilities, that they will achieve their ends and that others will share their good opinion of themselves. Self-respect is distinguished from this not in being the respect one confers on oneself in virtue of one's humanity (as opposed to some contingent status or properties one has), but rather is the attitude one has of oneself as a certain kind of person with a certain kind of value (or dignity), and this is a worth which makes certain forms of action and treatment appropriate for one and other forms of action and treatment 'beneath one' (Sachs 1981; Taylor 1985, p. 78). The 'dignified person' the person who 'has their self-respect,' is someone who acts in a way that manifests this understanding of their own value). The notions of self-respect and practical identity are therefore tightly intertwined: one's practical identity is one's understanding of oneself as a certain kind of person, having an attitude of self-respect consists in the awareness of this as making certain forms of action and treatment appropriate or inappropriate for one.

On this basis, we can understand humiliation as an 'attack' on one's self-respect (or dignity) in terms of the notion of self-presentation. When we engage in social interaction, we comport ourselves towards others in a particular kind of way in order to make a desirable impression on them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a classic study see Goffman (1959). Goffman (1981), Agha (2007, Ch. 3) and Taylor (2016) provide complimentary discussions of the notions of 'footing'.

Someone acts in a dignified manner in a social interaction when they act in a way that is expressive of their recognition of their value and of how one with that value or authority ought to act and be treated by others in that social interaction. This manner of comporting themselves is a practical stance — or ‘footing’ — adopted in social interaction towards the others with whom they are interacting. For a social interaction to proceed smoothly, it must involve a harmonious alignment of the mutual footing of each interlocutor.

The experience of humiliation can be understood as the experience of having one’s sincere self-presentation undermined: it consists in the deflation of the social stance one has adopted — a stance which is expressive of some aspect of one’s practical identity. When someone tries to humiliate you, they exhibit or imply in their treatment of you that you lack the value you present yourself as having. In order for their attempt at humiliating you to succeed, the social stance that you adopt (and which they are attacking) must actually be expressive of your practical identity (and therefore of your self-respect and sense of dignity). If it is not, if you are merely pretending to be a certain kind of person with a certain kind of value, the deflation of this stance will not humiliate you.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, their attempt to humiliate you will fail if you successfully enact, and thereby defend, your practical identity in the way you respond to their attempt to humiliate you. For example, The Security Guard in *The Wire* would avoid humiliation if he was able to successfully maintain his standing as a security guard, by detaining him until the police arrive.<sup>12</sup> Dostoyevsky’s narrator finally avoids humiliation when he holds his ground, enacting his understanding of himself as the officer’s equal, in such a way that the officer steps aside for him. What maintaining one’s stance comes to is, moreover, importantly relational: it involves one, as a person of a certain standing, responding to the other in a way appropriate to them as someone with their standing. As James (1890, p. 296) observes: ‘you must accept a challenge from an equal, but if challenged by an inferior you may laugh him to scorn’ (or, we might add, to humiliation).

Many forms of humiliation involve a deflation of a more basic aspect of one’s enacted practical identity — one’s understanding of oneself as a self-determining social agent. In the process of our development from early infancy to competent social agency, we are inculcated into the social world

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<sup>11</sup> This sincerity requirement does not require that one’s practical identity is accurate. A social climber might think of themselves as having a higher social status than they in fact have, and therefore can be humiliated when this is exposed.

<sup>12</sup> This is to simplify somewhat. In this case, the practical identity which is attacked is not his identity as a security guard — it is clear that his performance of this role is not part of his practical identity. The identity which is attacked is his understanding of himself as a father, traditionally understood as one who is able to provide for and protect his family. Marlo’s treatment of him, and his inability to do anything about it, means that he is unable to perform his role as a security guard and therefore provide for his family; his inability to act ‘as a man would’ in response to Marlo’s insult attacks his sense of himself as someone who is able to protect his family from people like Marlo.

by being taught a variety of complex norms and activities which result in a re-orientation towards our animal nature, the world and other people. This is brought about through, among other things, toilet training, learning to cover our intimate areas with clothing, the acquisition of socially acceptable eating and sleeping habits, learning what constitutes politeness and rudeness in the control of bodily occurrences like sneezing, burping and farting (MacIntyre 1999, p. 49). All of these achievements can be grouped together under the heading of learning to become a self-determining social agent who is able to apply to oneself a variety of socialised inhibitions (Danto 1973, pp. 158-9). In becoming a self-determining social agent, we learn to stand for ourselves, both literally and metaphorically.

When we engage in social interaction, we put ourselves forward as self-determining social agents and presuppose that those with whom we are interacting are too. When we lose control of ourselves before others, their laughter or pity can make us aware that we've unintentionally deflated our own standing as self-determining social agents. This is why it can be humiliating to slip down a flight of stairs, to lose bladder control or to lose the ability to dress oneself. An aspect of this loss of control of one's body as a source of humiliation is present in the example from Ellison's *Invisible Man* presented above. In that case he writes: 'Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity. I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man' (Ellison 1952, p. 21). It is also present in the example *Notes from Underground* when the officer moves the narrator without acknowledging him as if he was an object rather than a self-determining social agent.

This understanding of humiliation portrays it as being bad for us. Humiliation is an attack on one's practical identity, on one's understanding of oneself insofar as one has a certain kind of value and meaning. If one's practical identity is understood as a certain kind of description of oneself in terms of that which makes one's life meaningful and valuable then humiliation can be understood as a form of redescription. Rorty makes this point in the following passage:

[M]ost people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms...the best way to cause people long-lasting pain is to humiliate them by making the things that seemed most important to them look futile, obsolete, and powerless. Consider what happens when a child's precious possessions — the little things around which he weaves fantasies that make him a little different from all other children — are redescribed as "trash," and thrown away. (Rorty 1989, pp. 89-90)

As Marlo observes, the security guard wants it to be one way, but 'it's the other way'. This implies that having our practical identity acknowledged by others is good for us. There might be many forms such acknowledgement



can take but the basic case seems to be their *accepting* one's presentation of oneself and not acting in open *contradiction* with it. Rawls maintains that our self-respect, our sense of our own value, requires that one's person and one's deeds are 'appreciated and confirmed by others who are likewise esteemed and their association enjoyed' (Rawls 1999, p. 386).

This can seem to constitute progress from the puzzle of §3.2. The social stance we adopt in relation to another can, after all, be undermined or deflated by the way we are treated by others. But one might still wonder how this, in itself, could constitute a harm to me; or, more specifically, how this could constitute an attack on my sense of my own value. In what sense do I really need my practical identity to be confirmed by another? Can this be understood in such a way that it would make sense to think of humiliation as a way of being harmed? I will return to this question in §4.2, however in order to raise it productively we must do so in terms of an account of the form of interpersonal self-consciousness that humiliation involves. It is to this task that I now turn.

## §4. The Reductive Approach

### 4.1. *A reductive approach to humiliation*

Humiliation can be understood as an attack on one's practical identity, one's self-respect and one's dignity, through the deflation of one's sincere self-presentation. The experience of being humiliated consists in being exposed by another as not having the standing or worth that one put oneself forward as having. This naturally suggests views about (i) the experience of humiliation as a form of interpersonal self-consciousness; (ii) the act of humiliating another; and (iii) the 'good case' in which two subjects acknowledge one another's practical identities.

Let's begin with (i). Humiliation seems to involve a form of interpersonal self-consciousness in which one experiences oneself 'through the eyes of another' as not having the standing one presented oneself as having. A view of this sort is suggested by Gabriele Taylor in the following passage:

Being seen by that audience in that way implies, in the agent's view, that she is not being given the position which is due to her, or she had assumed was due to her. She therefore sees herself involved in a fall from a higher to a lower position. It is the fall itself which is here the prime concern, rather than her new degraded status. It does not matter whether...she accepts the fall as deserved or not, whether or not she accepts that she is, for example, as corrupt or weak as she is now though to be. She will in any case think of herself as being though presumptuous in having allotted to herself

such a high position, whether or not she shares this view. And she will think of herself as appearing contemptible or ludicrous just because she is not, in the audience's view, the sort of person she gave herself out to be. The judgement here is comparative...It is that she aspired to the high position when she had no business to do so, or appeared to others to do so, and it is this thought that she is regarded as presumptuous, which is essential to humiliation as it is not to shame. (Taylor 1985, pp. 67-68)

When one is humiliated, one experiences oneself as having lost standing in the eyes of others, as having put oneself forward as having a status which one, in fact, lacks. One's practical identity, the basis for one's self-respect and self-esteem, is seen by them to be presumptuous.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, Miller (1995, p. 167) writes that humiliation is 'the unavoidable pain attendant on the discovery of the divergence between how we see ourselves and how we see ourselves as others see us.'

This suggests that (ii) the experience of humiliation can be understood in terms of The Reductive Approach. On this view, it will be understood as consisting in a psychological state (a feeling, belief, perception or imagination) with a certain intentional content. When X feels humiliated, X is conscious of X, himself, as being viewed from the third person perspective of Y, and in such a way that X is regarded by Y as lacking the standing X put himself forward as having. This experience might take one of two forms. First, it might consist in X imagining how he looks from the perspective of Y on X insofar as Y is evaluating him in this way, all the while presupposing that he himself is X (cp. O'Brien 2011). Alternatively, it might be said that X sees that, judges that or believes that Y thinks of X in the way described by Taylor, all the while knowing that he himself is X (compare Peacocke 2014, Ch. 10).

If the experience of humiliation is understood as a psychological state that is constitutively independent from any irreducible relation holding between oneself and another in this way, then (ii) the act of humiliating someone will consist in any behaviour which brings about this experience (or doxastic state) in another. What the humiliator is *doing* and what the humiliated person is *undergoing* are therefore understood, on this approach, as being constitutively independent events. What the humiliator *does* is express their conception of the other, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and the emotional experience the humiliated person undergoes is a 'further effect' of this. The experience of humiliation is, on

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, this doesn't mean one ought to have 'less' self-respect, since all are entitled so self-respect solely in virtue of being human. It's just that one's respect for oneself insofar as one took oneself to have additional properties is ill-founded: one might have considered it beneath one's dignity to shop in a certain supermarket, but now you have been shown to have been just like us, on our level. One must therefore 'lower' one's self-respect in the sense that one must see its basis as resting in a 'lower' status than one previously took it to.

this view, ontologically and conceptually prior to the act of being humiliated by another or the humiliating oneself before an audience.

If humiliation consists in the awareness of another's conception of oneself, and the act of humiliating another consists in inducing this independently intelligible state of awareness in another, then (iii) 'the good case' will be, at minimum, one in which each subject acknowledges the other's self-presentation — thereby establishing what Goffman (1959) calls a 'shared definition of the situation'. 'Acknowledgement', in this sense, describes a practical stance, the stance of going along with, and not openly contradicting, the other's presentation of themselves. This is one way of treating someone with respect, and will therefore typically involve, all else being equal, thinking of them as being as they present themselves. However, acknowledgement of this sort does not require that one think of them in this way. Unfortunately, sometimes all things are not equal, and one can have reason to doubt the other's self-presentation (without doubting their sincerity). Nevertheless, in such circumstances sometimes it is respectful to acknowledge their self-presentation nevertheless, perhaps because one does not have the full story, or else because humouring them is, given one's circumstances, more respectful than challenging them. Of course, this makes clear how thin this minimal form of mutual acknowledgement is.<sup>14</sup>

#### *4.2. The puzzle of humiliation*

According to The Reductive Approach, the relation we describe as holding between X and Y when we say that X is humiliated by Y (the humiliator) or before Y (the audience) is reducible to the acts and psychological states of X and Y; these acts and states are understood as 'ontologically antecedent' to the relation of 'being humiliated by (or before) another' and can therefore be specified without reference to it. A consequence of this is that we should be able to specify what, if anything, is harmful about being humiliated in terms of some harmful change undergone by the subject which does not require mentioning any irreducible relation holding between the subject and the one before whom they are humiliated. This precludes a simple explanation of the harm of humiliation as being an intrinsically harmful way of being related to another, one which precludes the possibility of certain forms of communion (in the sense described in Chapter Three §6).

A consequence of this is that a version of the preliminary puzzle re-emerges. If my humiliation consists in my awareness of my loss of standing in the eyes of another, how could humiliation harm me? This experience might be bound with an instance of physical harm as is common in humiliation, but as we recognised at the outset, the harm of humiliation involves more than this. It is the product of the way the other sees me. But, if this involves a change in the other as Taylor suggests — that of their

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of the notion of a 'shared definition of a situation' which can be read as falling within remit of The Reductive Approach, see Goffman (Goffman 1959, pp. 20-24).

coming to see me as having a lower standing than that which I presented myself as having — then this is a change undergone by the other rather than me. Thus, Julius writes: ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones. Will other people’s conception of me ever hurt me?’ (Julius 2016, p. 195).

The change in question must therefore consist in the experience of humiliation I undergo. What about this experience makes it a harmful one for me to undergo? If the preceding paragraph is right it cannot be that it is the experience of an intrinsically harmful object or state of affairs. Nor can this be remedied by drawing attention to the fact that the content of this experience — one’s loss of standing in the eyes of another — is extrinsically harmful. Losing standing in the eyes of another undoubtedly brings many further harms in its wake. Many of these further harms will be instances of physical abuse, but the kind ‘further effect’ that is most salient to the person who feels humiliated is not physical abuse as such, but further instances of humiliation. When a teenager is humiliated at a party, what they often fear most about showing their face at school the following day is often more episodes of humiliation — being laughed at, talked about behind their back and physical abuse insofar as it constitutes a humiliation as opposed to a mere physical harm. This is sufficient to highlight the implausibility of an explanation of the harm of humiliation exclusively in terms of its consequences. We can only give a phenomenologically satisfying account of humiliation’s harmful further effects by first explaining the intrinsic harmfulness of humiliation.

It is frequently said that our practical identities — the descriptions of ourselves in terms of which we understand ourselves as having value — require confirmation by others (e.g. Rawls 1999; Todorov 2001, p. 33). The most straightforward interpretation of ‘confirmation’ as it occurs in this statement is epistemic. We wish others to see us as we present ourselves since this will provide further evidential support for our self-conception. As Rawls claimed, ‘unless our endeavours are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile’ (Rawls 1999 p. 387). In a similar vein, Hume observes:

nothing is more natural than for us to embrace the opinions of others in this particular; both from sympathy, which renders all their sentiments intimately present to us; and from reasoning, which makes us regard their judgement, as a kind of argument for what they affirm. These two principles of authority and sympathy influence almost all our opinions; but must have a peculiar influence, when we judge of our own worth and character. (Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.9, pp. 320-1).

It is a familiar idea that my knowledge of myself and the psychological sustainability of my self-conception are interdependent with my knowledge of others, most particularly my knowledge of how they see me. Insofar as

we have an interest in seeing ourselves in a positive light, we might desire to encounter others who acknowledge our presentation of ourselves insofar as this enables us to confirm our own good opinions of ourselves. Equally, we might be interested in the opinions of others insofar as they serve as a natural corrective to our tendencies towards self-aggrandisement and delusion. MacIntyre (1999, p. 95) is undoubtedly right that ‘genuine and extensive self-knowledge becomes possible only in consequence of those social relationships which on occasion provide badly needed correction of our own judgments’. None of this, however, is sufficient to explain why humiliation is bad for me. Being humiliated might undermine my good opinion of myself but this does not entail that it is bad for me. For all that has been said it might be good for me, disabusing me of a delusion. Nor is this a necessary feature of the harmfulness of humiliation — as Taylor acknowledges, I can feel humiliated even if I know that I’m being misrepresented in the eyes of the world. Big Eagle, a chief of the Santee Sioux, said:

Many of the whites always seemed to say by their manner when they saw an Indian, ‘I am better than you,’ and the Indians did not like this. There was an excuse for this, but the Dakotas [Sioux] did not believe there were better men in the world than they (Brown 1970, p. 38-39)

We can understand how it might be demeaning and humiliating to be treated as a member of an inferior caste, and how this might be experienced as being bad for one, even if it leaves the humiliated subject’s self-conception epistemically untouched. We might imagine these young Sioux, as described by Big Eagle, as being confident in their knowledge that they aren’t inferior to those who subject them to routine humiliation, and yet nevertheless recognise that in being humiliated in these ways they are harmed (compare Julius 2016, p. 195).

#### *4.3. A pain-based strategy*

Can we understand the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of its painfulness (or alternatively, its unpleasantness)? As Hume observes,

we are peculiarly pleas’d with any thing, that confirms the good opinion we have of ourselves, and are easily shock’d with whatever opposes it (Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.9, pp. 320-1).

More generally, O’Brien (2020, p. 550) observes that ‘it hurts being conscious of having a lowered social value’ and that, as a consequence, the opinions of others can ‘impinge on us in a painful and uncomfortable way.’ It is becoming increasingly common in psychology and neuroscience for

researchers to suggest that our emotional reactions to threats to our desired relationships with others constitute a special type of pain akin to physical pain.<sup>15</sup> Eisenberger and Lieberman (2004), for example, define a kind of ‘social pain’ which should be understood as ‘the distressing experience arising from the perception of actual or potential psychological distance from close others or a social group’.

Let us concede, for the sake of argument, that these emotional reactions constitute a special kind of pain. It is somewhat unclear what turns on describing experiences of ‘hurt feelings’, grief or humiliation, as painful as opposed to merely unpleasant. One difference between describing humiliation as a kind of pain no less painful than physical sort (as opposed to merely unpleasant experience) is that it can make the following line of thought seem compelling. Physical pain is bad for us, harmful, not merely insofar as it is associated with certain forms of bodily damage, but also in virtue of the way it feels.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, we might understand the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of its painfulness. The success of the strategy turns on the aptness of the analogy between physical pain and the ‘social pain’ of our emotional responses. There are, however, important disanalogies.

One important disanalogy is that even if we believe that physical pains are bad not merely because they are associated with harmful physical damage to one’s body but also in virtue of how they feel, the same point should not be so quickly conceded when it comes to so-called ‘social pains’.<sup>17</sup> Grief, for example, is a form of suffering in response to the loss of a loved one and therefore a form of social pain, however we should be reluctant to concede that it is a harmful thing to feel. Though the feeling of grief is an emotional response to the harm of losing a loved one, it does not itself constitute a harm. When we feel grief in response to a loved one, though it is a form of suffering which hurts a great deal, we might nevertheless recognise that we would be much worse off if we felt nothing in response to our loss, and we therefore might wish to continue feeling it, for a time at least (Kraut 2007, p. 155). This is not to suggest that grief and its place in a good life does not raise philosophical questions and puzzles of its own, but only to note that the line of thought expressed in the previous

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<sup>15</sup> This suggestion is sometimes made by philosophers. See Korsgaard (1996, p. 148), Goldie (2000, p. 57) and Klein (2007, p. 531).

<sup>16</sup> See also MacDonald and Leary (2005). Corns (2015) subjects this claim and the arguments offered in its favour, to a sustained critique. If she is right, then the present strategy must be interpreted as an attempt to explain the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of its unpleasantness. The objections I offer below still apply on this alternative interpretation.

<sup>17</sup> Though many will want to resist this suggestion for bodily pains too. Consideration of masochism might suggest that, in certain contexts, a certain kind and degree of pain can be pleasurable.

paragraph is problematic insofar as it seems to entail that grief is obviously bad for us.<sup>18</sup>

A tempting response to this objection might be to concede that the experience of grief can be good for us on the whole, since it is an appropriate response to the loss of a loved one (or because bottling one's feelings up will be worse for one's psychological health in the long run), but that it is nevertheless bad for us to the extent that it is painful. The painfulness of grief is therefore viewed as a cost which counts to some extent against feeling it, but one that is outweighed by the other benefits of grieving.

One issue with this view is that it seems to entail that it would be better to have the good, healthy aspects of grief, without the suffering. This, however, seems to reflect a naive understanding of what it is to grieve. Rather, the distinctive painfulness of grief is inseparable from those other aspects of the experience of grief in such a way that we cannot determine whether a pain is good or bad for us independently of whether the experience of which it is an aspect is good or bad for us.

This alternative understanding of the painfulness of grief would not be available, however, if we thought of pain and painfulness as a quale, a distinctive feeling present in all painful experiences.<sup>19</sup> If we think of pain in this way, as a phenomenological atom, then we can treat the painfulness of an emotional reaction such as grief or humiliation as being independent of the other aspects of that experience, such as the formal object of the emotional experience in question. We can call this the 'tack on view of painfulness'. If this view is true, then we will be forced to think that if the experience of grief is painful, then it is constituted in part by a pain-quale, and since, *ex hypothesi*, this quale is inherently bad for us, then the view I called 'naive' above is the correct view.

I noted above that this conception of painfulness and displeasure, though a common one, is neither mandatory nor plausible. In addition to the implausible picture it paints of grief, there is little to be said in its favour, phenomenologically speaking. Is it really plausible that there is a distinctive painfulness quale or an unpleasantness quale, and therefore a 'distinctive feeling' characteristic of all painful and unpleasant experiences? Without further argument, there is little reason to think this is true and good reason to doubt it. This point is well made by Korsgaard:

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<sup>18</sup> One disanalogy which I will not discuss is that in the case of forms of unpleasant emotional reaction we can often stand back and consider whether they are appropriate in a way that does not seem appropriate when it comes to physical pain. This opens up the possibility that the pleasure-based approach will face some of the issues faced by desire-based approaches that I will discuss later in §4.4.

<sup>19</sup> See Anscombe (2001 p. 77; 1958, p. 3), who traces this view to the philosophies of Locke, Hume and Bentham. Bramble (2006, see especially p. 212) has recently attempted to defend this view.

If the painfulness of pain rested in the character of the sensations...our belief that physical pain has something in common with grief, rage and disappointment would be inexplicable. For that matter, what physical pains have in common with each other would be inexplicable, for the sensations are of many different kinds. What do nausea, migraine, menstrual cramps, pinpricks, and pinches have in common, that makes us call them all pains? (Korsgaard 1996, p. 148)

Insofar as this response to my first objection to the pain-based approach rests on a 'distinctive feeling' or 'internal impression' view of displeasure and pain, it is, for similar reasons implausible. The painfulness of backache, grief and humiliation seem to be inextricable from the other features of the experiences of which they are a part. Therefore, there does not seem to be a 'distinctive feeling' common to these examples in virtue of which they count as unpleasant or as painful. If this is so, then there is little reason to suppose that the painfulness of an experience always entails that it is harmful. To say that an experience is painful, then, does not entail that it (or its 'painfulness') is bad for us (or even 'counts against' it in the putative ledger which decides whether it is good or bad for us). So a straightforward explanation of humiliation cannot be offered in terms of its painfulness or its unpleasantness.

This does not foreclose the possibility that we can understand the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of its painfulness. It only shows that more must be said about the specific way in which humiliation is painful. This leads to a second problem with this strategy, which is that it presumes a prior understanding of the distinctive way in which humiliation is painful, in contrast with the different ways in which grief, menstrual cramps, and the frustration of being unable to solve a puzzle are painful. There are two ways we might seek to provide a phenomenologically apt characterisation of the distinctive way in which humiliation is painful: we might do so either in terms of the intentional contents of the experience of being humiliated or in terms of the frustration of some desire that is associated with humiliation.

Let's begin with the content-focused strategy. We might seek to provide an articulation of the distinctive form of painful experience characteristic of humiliation in terms of the object, event or state of affairs it is an emotional reaction too. The challenge facing this strategy, however, is to do this in a way that does not already presuppose the idea that humiliation is harmful. This, after all, is what we are trying to explain. If we could understand how losing standing in the eyes of another could harm us, then we would not need to appeal to the painfulness of humiliation to explain its harmfulness; rather, we could appeal to the fact that it is harmful in a distinctive way to explain its distinctive painfulness.



The alternative line of defence to the pain-based strategy is to explain the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of the frustration of some associated desire. This strategy can take two forms depending on one's approach to the topic of displeasure and pain: an 'indirect' approach, in which the harmfulness of humiliation is understood in terms of its unpleasantness, and its unpleasantness of humiliation understood in terms of the frustration of a desire; or a 'direct' approach, which remains neutral on the topic of displeasure and pain and seeks to explain the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of such a desire. Since the direct approach is more straightforward and the objections which apply to it also apply to the 'indirect' approach, I will end my consideration of pain-based strategies and turn to a 'desire-based strategy'

#### *4.4. A desire-based strategy*

Can we understand the harmfulness of humiliation in terms of the frustration of our innate approbative desires? We are, after all, social creatures that desire recognition, admiration and esteem. For present purposes, we might draw attention to the characteristically human desire for others to see us as we present ourselves as being. When we are humiliated, this desire is frustrated and it is for this reason that we think of humiliation as a harm.

It is clear that there is such a desire (or assortment of desires) and that it has played an important role in our evolutionary history.<sup>20</sup> This admission is not sufficient for the success of the desire-based strategy. In order for this strategy to succeed, an account of these desires and the way their frustration constitutes a harm must be provided within the constraints of The Reductive Approach. Such an account cannot presuppose the idea that being seen in a particular way by another can harm us or that we need a certain kind of recognition. A desire-based account of this form faces two challenges.

The first challenge is that it is not true in general that the frustration of some desire one has harms one. Consider Quinn's (1993b, p. 236) example of the man who wants to turn on all of the radios in his vicinity, not because he thinks doing so is good or fitting or will give him pleasure, not because he has an insatiable appetite for information or entertainment, nor even because he wants to hear anything. Rather, he just finds himself with this 'brute' desire. It is not plausible that frustrating this man's desire — if we even want to call it that — would genuinely harm him, so what makes our desire for good standing different? Our desire to have our practical identities recognised is importantly different from this since it is not a 'brute' urge we find ourselves with. It is one which we can explain from within our 'personal perspective' as being desirable in certain respects, and therefore to give what Anscombe (2000, §37) calls a 'desirability-

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<sup>20</sup> See Gilbert (1997) and Tomasello (2019).

characterisation' of the object of their desire: a characterisation of the object of their desire as being good under some description.<sup>21</sup> This leads to a second challenge, however, since it is unclear how to provide such a desirability characterisation of this object which would make it plausible that its frustration would constitute a harm and to do so without presupposing rather than explaining the idea that having one's self-presentation recognised by another is good for one.

According to The Reductive Approach, the object of my desire is the other's recognition of my sincere self-presentation. Can this object be given a desirability-characterisation which does not presuppose the idea that its satisfaction is good for me and its frustration bad for me (as the explanatory ambitions of The Reductive Approach requires)? The arguments of §4.3 are sufficient to show that this characterisation cannot appeal to the pleasure we take in such recognition. Another way in which this object can be characterised as desirable is that it is one in which the other is subject to accurate appearances and has true beliefs (by the desiring subject's lights at least). But an explanation of this form will not explain why the frustration of this desire is bad for me rather than simply being bad for the other who has the inaccurate belief or is subject to the inaccurate appearance. Finally, it might be regarded as desirable because it is intrinsically good for me to receive such recognition and intrinsically bad for me to be seen in the way I am seen when I am humiliated. This seems to be correct, but it presupposes what is to be explained: we want to understand how this recognition, as described by The Reductive Approach, could constitute a genuine harm for me.

Even if it is conceded that we have a hard-wired tendency to think that this kind of recognition is desirable, this will only entail that when we are humiliated we are hard-wired to judge that we are harmed. It will not enable us to make sense of our experience of humiliation. If this desire is understood as a 'brute' desire which we find ourselves lumped with thanks to our evolutionary history, then it will be analogous to the radioman's so-called desire. This paints a deeply unattractive picture of our relation to our social nature. We are self-conscious social animals, and therefore are able to stand back from our instinctual desires and appetites and call them into question.<sup>22</sup> Simply pointing to the fact that we find ourselves with these desires is insufficient to make sense of the pre-reflectively plausible thought that humiliation constitutes a genuine harm for creatures like us, and appealing to the detached explanations of evolutionary theory does not

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<sup>21</sup> Some would deny that the radioman's state is genuinely one of desire because all desire involves apprehending its object as desirable (or, else, that one is able, if asked, to give some desirability characterisation of it) (e.g. Anscombe 2000, §35-40; Quinn 1993b; Scanlon 1998, p. 38; and Boyle & Lavin 2010). Though I find the counterexamples to this thesis indecisive (see e.g. Velleman 1992), the argument offered here is not committed to this general thesis. All that is required is that, for this particular desire, if its frustration is to be experienced as a harm, one must apprehend its object as desirable in some way.

<sup>22</sup> Cp. McDowell (1998c, p. 172).

enable us to make sense of these desires from our personal point of view. If we believed this view, our susceptibility to humiliation would come to seem inappropriate, insofar as we occupy the standpoint of reflection. It would appear to be an aspect of our animal nature that we would be better off without, if only we had the means to get rid of it. If this is right there is a harm associated with humiliation but not the harm we were first inclined to suspect — the harm in question will consist in our susceptibility to the illusion that the way we are seen by others can harm us when in fact they cannot. This results in a conception of our nature as rational animals which necessarily places us in conflict with our social instincts.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, having one's self-presentation acknowledged *is* desirable (as it is pleasant) and having one's self-presentation deflated *is* undesirable (as it is unpleasant, perhaps even painful). We should not let our ordinary, unproblematic grasp of this fact obscure the way in which The Reductive Approach makes it problematic. If we give up the ambition of reducing the relation of being humiliated by (or before) another to the states and acts of each subject that are ontologically antecedent to this relation, a straightforward explanation of the harm of humiliation is available. The reductive theorist fails to specify a harmful change that the individual undergoes because there is no such change in the individual's ontologically antecedent states: the harm is essentially relational. In the next section I will outline an account of this sort.

### §5. Humiliation: a transactional account

In this section, I will outline a transactional account of humiliation according to which, to feel humiliated is to be conscious of oneself as being (or as having been) humiliated and to be humiliated is a particular way of being *acted upon* by another which cannot be understood except as an aspect of an ontologically primitive transaction holding between oneself, the humiliated person, and the other who is experienced as acting upon one.

This account is outlined in five stages. I begin with an elaboration of the notion of assuming a social stance (introduced in §3.3) in terms of the notion of a mutual situation introduced in Chapter Two and developed in Chapter Three (§5.1). On this basis, I will provide an account of humiliation, beginning forms of humiliation which involve one person being humiliated *by* another (§5.2) and then extending this account to cases in which one is described as being humiliated *before* another (§5.3) and cases of humiliation which occur outside of a mutual situation (§5.4). Finally, I will provide an elucidation of the intrinsic harmfulness of these ways of being related to another by situating them in the wider context of the life-cycle of human beings (§5.5).

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<sup>23</sup> See Introduction (2) §2.3.

### *5.1. Self-presentation in a mutual situation*

When two (or more) people make eye contact, engage in joint attention or have a face to face conversation, they each become openly and self-consciously oriented around one another, thereby establishing a mutual practical situation.<sup>24</sup> Each subject is necessitated to respond to the other, and since we are naturally concerned with the way we are attuned with others of our kind (and therefore with the impression we make on them), each subject's response to the other will involve a form of self-presentation. Each person will act in such a way as to make a certain impression on the other, to present themselves as being a certain kind of person and as standing in a certain kind of relation to the other, through the things they say, the way they speak and the way they hold themselves. In relating to one another in this way, each individual adopts a social stance in relation to the other which is expressive of their sense of their relationship and therefore of their sense of which forms of interaction are appropriate to that relationship and which are not.

This is an abstract way of stating an easily observable social phenomenon: in relating to you in a certain kind of way, in standing up tall, looking you in the eye and speaking to you as an equal, I assume the social stance of being your equal. You might acknowledge this stance, responding to me accordingly, or you might adopt the stance of an inferior, chiding me for trying to get above my station. If you respond in the first way, the stances we adopt to one another will be in harmony and we will be on an equal, harmonious, footing with one another. If you respond in the second way, our interaction will take a disharmonious form until one of us wins out and establishes either a footing of equality (if I 'win') or one in which you are superior (if you 'win'). What 'winning' comes to in such a situation involves an individual's modification of their social stance to conform with that adopted by the other. Exactly how each individual presents themselves will be expressive of their sense of who they consider themselves to be and the value (or dignity) they take themselves to have. The footing each has in relation to the other will thereby be a product of their respective practical identities, among other things.

The footing which holds between individuals will vary with the context and nature of the interaction. Two brothers might adopt stances towards one another which express their sense of being equals in the interaction by comporting themselves politely, dealing with any disagreements they have in a respectful manner rather than by speaking down to one another or by expecting deference, etc. This might be contrasted with their comportment towards their authoritarian father, to whom they address, as they were brought up to, with deference. They might disagree with him about what to do — when they go on a family holiday, for example — but they will always

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Two §5 and Chapter 3 (§§5-6)

do so in a way that acknowledges that he gets the final say on the matter, and so on. These hierarchies, however, are neither permanent nor absolute. They are not permanent because gradually, as time moves on, one of these brothers might assume the father's role. They are not absolute because they will vary with the context of the interaction. If the conversation concerns a global pandemic, the brother who is an immunologist might adopt (and be recognised as adopting) an authoritative stance and the comportment of the others will be one of deference to his knowledge; the other brother, an economist, might adopt a similar stance when the conversation is about an economic recession, and both might adopt a deferential comportment to their father when the topic is how to brew the best bitter.

In the examples outlined above, each individual adopts a complementary social stance towards the other, and as a consequence their footing with respect to one another is harmonious (where this will involve a form of harmonious emotional attunement as described in Chapter Three). Their footing, however, may become disharmonious or combative, if they assume conflicting practical stances. Perhaps the older brother continues to adopt the tone of a superior to the younger brother when the latter now considers them to be equals. Because the stance each individual adopts is not a static thing, but a pattern of activity they are prone to enact depending on how they are treated, these conflictual stances will themselves generate further conflict. When the older brother doesn't treat the younger brother as an equal, part of what it is for the younger brother to maintain the standing (of an equal) is to challenge this way of being treated. The conflicts that ensue can be understood as a kind of 'renegotiation' in which each agent enacts their respective practical identity, until one of them gives out — either the younger brother eventually gives in, assuming a deferential stance towards their brother, or the older brother stops being so high and mighty towards the younger brother, adopting the stance of a respectful equal, or the conflict persists until the interaction ends. This was the conflict which motivated Dostoyevsky's narrator, as he himself admits, to put himself on an 'equal footing' with the officer.

This is a brief and simple outline of an extremely complex phenomenon. A full account of human communication would elaborate further on these forms of self-presentation and the notion of interpersonal 'footing'. This outline, however, is sufficient to provide the basis for a Transactional Account of Humiliation.

### *5.2. Being humiliated by another*

When  $x$  tries to humiliate  $y$ ,  $x$  acts towards  $y$  in a way that threatens to undermine a social stance  $y$  has adopted, and, in doing so,  $x$  tries to attack  $y$ 's practical identity by exposing  $y$  as not the kind of person they presented themselves as being. This would involve treating  $y$  in such a way that, if  $y$  did not respond appropriately, would result in the deflation of  $y$ 's stance.  $y$ 's social stance is 'deflated' in the sense that they are not able to maintain this

social stance in response to the threat constituted by  $x$ 's attempt at humiliating them. What it would be for  $y$  to 'respond appropriately' in such a circumstance would be for them to respond to this threat in a way that enacts (and therefore maintains) the social stance in question. In the past someone might respond to an insult by challenging their foe to a duel and, if they win, they will have maintained (or perhaps even strengthened) their honour against the threat posed by the other. But if they do not respond to the insult, their foe will have exposed them as not being the person they made themselves out to be (unless their enemy is not the kind of person who is able to insult them, in which case maintaining a lofty indifference will be a way of maintaining their dignified stance). When, moreover, this deflation is in their common ground, the other in question will take it for granted in all future interactions, which thereby poses an obstacle to any attempt by the humiliated person to take up that social stance in relation to this particular other in the future.

Consider, in this respect, the example from *Notes from Underground*. The narrator seeks to present himself as being 'on an equal footing' with the officer in two respects. In the tavern example, he initially adopts a stance towards the officer in which he presents himself as the kind of person who, in not letting the officer past, can insult him, and therefore as being the kind of person with whom it would be appropriate for the officer to get into a brawl. In the scene on Nevsky Prospekt, he presents himself as being on an equal footing with the officer insofar as he presents himself as being the kind of person whom the officer might step aside for. In each case, the narrator is unable to maintain this social standing in relation to the other. In the first case, the officer simply moves him aside as if he was a piece of furniture and in the second he is continuously unable to stand his ground and refrain from stepping aside for the officer. In each case, as he himself observes he 'simply could not be on an equal footing with him' (Dostoyevsky 1993 p. 53).

Being humiliated by another not only constitutes a disharmonious footing between us in a mutual situation, it also constitutes a form of disharmonious emotional attunement (in the sense introduced in Chapter Three §5). My affective response to the other — my feeling of being humiliated by them — is interdependent with my awareness of their affective response to me, whether it be contempt, humour or pity. When the other successfully humiliates me, they modify the way we are attuned to one another. In particular, when they deflate my social standing, they inflate their own insofar as they assume a stance in which they exert power over me, thereby subordinating me and making our footing an unequal one.

What the other does to me in successfully humiliating me, and what I thereby undergo in standing in this relation to them, are two aspects of a single irreducible transaction, as on the account I outlined in Part One. Therefore my feeling of humiliation is not a 'further effect' of their act of humiliating me, as it is on The Reductive Approach. Rather, there is no way

of describing what I undergo independently of the footing which holds between both of us.

### 5.3. *Being humiliated before another*

There are instances of humiliation in which we are humiliated *before* someone which we would not describe as cases in which we are humiliated *by* them. Examples of this kind of case include experiences of humiliation produced by one's own actions, when one unintentionally does something which deflates the social stance one has adopted towards others, by saying something foolish in a presentation on a topic one has presented oneself as knowing something about, or by losing control of oneself by failing to maintain bladder control, burping repeatedly or slipping over in a crowded room, spilling wine over oneself.<sup>25</sup> If the audience start pointing and laughing at me in response to one of these events (as they do in response to the narrator of *The Invisible Man*), then we might say that they, as a group, are humiliating me and we can straightforwardly treat it in line with the explanation offered above. If, however, they look on at me in pity then we might instead be inclined to say that if anyone is responsible for my humiliation, the responsibility is mine alone. Nevertheless, these cases can be understood in terms of the explanation offered in §5.2. My failure to maintain my social stance towards the other has created a situation which they must respond to, which they can either actively ignore me, look at me with pity, or laugh at me (this list is not exhaustive). In each of these cases, their response to me has an *impact* upon me, determining my practical situation in such a way that I can no longer straightforwardly maintain my practical stance. The difference between being humiliated *by* another and being humiliated *before* a pitying audience is a difference between a situation in which one indirectly undermines one's own social stance in a mutual situation, and a situation in which one's social stance is attacked by another. Both of these cases, however, are cases in which I experience the other's attending to me as *acting upon* me and therefore as *affecting* me. In each case it is their reaction which prevents me from straightforwardly re-assuming that social stance, since they now look upon me with pity when I'm trying to maintain the dignified stance of an equal, for example. This is the thing that unites both kinds of humiliation: they are both ways of being *acted upon* by the one before whom one is humiliated, in the one case in which this is the other is *acting upon me* directly, by humiliating me, and in the other where they *act upon me* through their reaction to something I have done. As we saw in Chapter Two, another's reaction to me itself has an impact upon me:

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<sup>25</sup> If I intentionally do these things, then they will constitute part of the social stance I adopt. This why I cannot humiliate myself intentionally. In this respect, humiliation is analogous to making a mistake: if I try to make a mistake in solving a crossword, then I am simply not engaged in the act of completing a crossword — in each of these cases, one is just 'pretending' to make a mistake, just 'pretending' to humiliate oneself, though this can get out of control: the audience, if they don't respond as you expect, might end up humiliating you (compare Davidson 1980, p. 45).

their expression of their emotional reaction during a mutual situation to me itself makes an impression upon me (see Chapter Two, §5.3)

#### 5.4. *Humiliation outside of a mutual situation*

The availability of this form of interpersonal transaction makes possible forms of humiliation which do not themselves occur within a mutual situation in which two subjects are openly and self-consciously oriented around one another. Cases of this sort abound: I might be humiliated by overhearing someone make fun of me though I am not ‘in’ a mutual situation with them. The way I’m affected by them does not deflate any social stance I am currently adopting in relation to them. A more complicated case is one in which I can be described, from the third person perspective, as being humiliated though I do not feel humiliated at the time. I might be having a conversation with a group and think the others are laughing *with* me when they are actually laughing *at* me (where that they are doing so is ‘out in the open’ between them but not to me). I might realise this and feel humiliation. If I do, I might also judge that they humiliated me *then*, at the time when they were laughing at me, though they were not literally acting upon me at that point in time.<sup>26</sup>

In Chapter One (§4.5) I argued that we can understand the prototypical form of ordinary self-consciousness as that in which I feel self-conscious before an actual other’s gaze, and we can understand other phenomena described as kinds of ‘ordinary self-consciousness’ in relation to this prototypical structure. Similarly, the case of humiliation in a mutual situation should be understood as the prototypical form of humiliation. This prototypical form of humiliation, however, makes possible forms of humiliation which occur outside of mutual situation, but which cannot be understood without reference to past or future mutual situations. For example, one would not be humiliated in the case where one overhears someone making fun of the way one acts if they had never adopted the social stance which is being undermined behind their back. A full account of this kind of experience of humiliation must also make reference to the way in which this experience constitutes an obstacle to one’s being able to straightforwardly adopt this practical stance to these particular others in the future. With regard to the second case it is important to note we are inclined to describe someone as being humiliated without feeling humiliated only if we judge that if they became aware of the fact that these others were laughing *at* them (rather than *with* them) they would feel humiliated. If someone never felt humiliation in response to being laughed at by this particular group in a mutual situation. You cannot humiliate someone by doing something to them which, if they were aware that you were doing it

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<sup>26</sup> Note that insofar as I claim that the feeling of humiliation consists in the feeling of being or having been humiliated, I am not committed to the claim that the feeling of humiliation can only occur during episodes of mutual transaction, only that it cannot be understood without reference to such transactions.



to them, would not result in their feeling humiliated — once again, it all depends on the actual social stance they adopt (or have adopted in the past). All of these cases are different ways of deflating another's self-presentation (past or present) which are made possible by the prototypical form of humiliation.

This account is complex in that not all episodes of humiliation are forms of interpersonal transaction, but all forms of humiliation are *either* forms of interpersonal transaction *or* only possible on the basis of those forms of humiliation which are interpersonal transactions. This can explain why all such cases, in one way or another, are bad for us. Though this results in a more complex view of the practices of humiliating and being humiliated, more would need to be said to show that this is a problem for my account. In my view, this complexity mirrors the complexity of the phenomenon.

### 5.5. *Humiliation and the shared life*

On this view, to be humiliated is to be related to another in a primitive interpersonal transaction which is intrinsically harmful. This enables us to explain where The Reductive Approach goes wrong: it is unable to make sense of the harm of humiliation in terms of a harmful change because it is unable to acknowledge the idea that the harmful change in question is irreducibly relational. The Transactional Approach is able to acknowledge this idea in a way that resolves the puzzle of humiliation, and it also has the resources to provide a further elucidation of the way in which humiliation is harmful by situating it in terms of the wider context of the life cycle of human beings.<sup>27</sup> In addition to nutrition, bodily maintenance and reproduction, we seek interpersonal communion and emotional attunement in the sense introduced in Chapter Three (§§5-6). Without these kinds of interpersonal contact our lives are deprived in an important respect. Our desire for others to acknowledge the social stances we sincerely adopt in relation to them has its home in this context. Insofar as these stances are expressive of our practical identities, we want the other to recognise this insofar as we want to share a view of one another and of our relationship. This is most obvious with close personal relationships, but we often seek forms of interpersonal communion with other 'co-travellers' throughout life, whether they be colleagues or, (more literally), or our co-travellers on a long-haul flight. We can understand the harmfulness of humiliation in relation to our need for communion insofar as being humiliated undermines the possibility of a certain form of communion, constituting, as it does, a disharmonious shared experience (in the sense of Chapter Three §5). These forms of shared experience, whether of the desirable or the undesirable (humiliating) can contribute to (or detract from) our wellbeing, partially determining whether a stretch of our lives is either going well or badly. When I am humiliated by (or before) another, where this is 'out in the open'

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<sup>27</sup> This account might be further elaborated within the framework of Foot (2001).

between us, it becomes a part of our shared past, determining the situation from which we must act in any future interaction with these particular others. This does not preclude a successful re-adoption of the social stance which was challenged or deflated, but it does make this more difficult and, once adopted, susceptible to a kind of risk. For example, a humiliating event that forms a part of one's shared history with another is available to be mentioned and reinvigorated at any future point, and this is most acutely felt before people who were not present during the event of one's original humiliation. This opens up an explanation of the way in which humiliation can wound us. If the experience of humiliation can constitute an injury, as I have argued that it can, we can understand the event of one's humiliation as a moment in one's shared history with some specific others, as constituting a wound which lingers and is always liable to be re-opened.

### §6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an account which makes intelligible the role of humiliation in human social life and the special importance placed on it as a distinctively human form of harm. In doing so, I have responded to two kinds of puzzle which emerge in relation to humiliation. The first concerned how to understand the idea that my self-respect and dignity could be attacked ('The Puzzle of Self-Respect'). The second concerned how to understand the idea that the way I am seen by another could be harmful for me ('The Puzzle of Humiliation'). In each case the respective puzzle was found to rest on a mistaken picture of humiliation. In the first case it was based in an overly rationalistic conception of self-respect and dignity. In response, I urged a picture of the relevant notions of self-respect and dignity in terms of the notions of practical identity, self-presentation and its deflation. The second puzzle was found to rest on a reductive account of the relation between two subjects, one of whom is humiliated by or before the other. This puzzle can be avoided, however, if The Reductive Approach is replaced with an account outlined in terms of The Transactional Approach. This account can make sense of the idea that being humiliated by another is an intrinsically harmful relation and this harm can be further elucidated in terms of the idea, defended in Chapter Three, that human life is a special sort of shared life, one which characteristically aims at communion with others.

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## Making Sense of Shame

He groaned at his disgrace  
 Unfolding his ill-fame  
 And blood suffused his face  
 When he showed his mark of shame  
 (*Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, p. 114).

### §1. Introduction

Shame, like embarrassment and humiliation, manifests our concern with how we stand ‘in the eyes of others’. Sartre (2018, p. 308) recognises this when he observes that ‘shame in its primary structure is shame *before somebody*...I am ashamed of myself *as I appear* to the Other.’ Shame is unlike these other emotions, however, in that it manifests our concern not merely with how we appear to others, but also with how we actually are. Thus Sartre adds, ‘shame is recognition. I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me.’ This point is most visible when we consider the relationship between shame and the shameful: when I am ashamed of myself I feel myself (or some aspect of myself) to *be*, as opposed to merely appearing to be, shameful. These aspects of shame — the way in which it is concerned with how we appear on the one hand and how we are on the other — must be duly acknowledged, and their relationship explained, by any satisfactory account of the nature of shame and its place in human social life.

I will argue that this seemingly straightforward task poses serious difficulties for The Reductive Approach, which finds itself caught in an oscillation between two unsatisfying positions. This chapter begins with a preliminary phenomenological description of shame, elaborating on the two features highlighted above. On this basis, I raise two questions: an explanatory question about the form of interpersonal self-consciousness that is apparently involved in shame, and a normative question about the proper place of shame in human social life (§2). There are two forms The Reductive Approach can take depending on how it addresses these questions. Some, focusing on the idea that shame is a form of consciousness of oneself as *being* shameful insist that shame is a form of adverse self-evaluation (‘The Self-Evaluation View’). The problem with this view, however, is that it is unable to make sense of the way shame is inherently concerned with how we appear to others. Moved by these considerations, some argue instead that shame consists in the awareness of

oneself as being adversely evaluated by others ('The Social Evaluation View'). This view fares no better than The Self-Evaluation View, however, because though it seems to acknowledge the role of the other in shame, it fails to properly acknowledge the way shame is a form of consciousness of oneself as being (rather than merely appearing to be) shameful. Finally, §3 closes with an argument to show that this oscillation cannot be avoided by conjoining these views into a 'Social Self-Evaluation View'. After recapitulating the challenge facing The Reductive Approach in §4, I argue that The Transactional Approach has the resources to provide an account of shame which avoids these difficulties and is compatible with a more satisfying understanding of the place of shame in human social life (§5).

## §2. The phenomenology of shame

### 2.1. *Shame and the shameful*

To feel ashamed of oneself is to experience oneself, or some feature of oneself or one's history, as being shameful. This anodyne truth does little to illuminate the nature of shame, which is probably why it so seldom stated in the philosophical literature. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge it because it makes explicit the important relationship between shame and the shameful. As a way forward, we might ask: what is it for something to be shameful? The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on 'shame' is as good a place as any to start from. It defines shame as:

the painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances.

Similarly, the shameful is defined as that which 'causes or ought to cause shame; disgraceful, scandalous, degrading'.

These definitions make reference both to the idea that one appears a certain way to others (dishonoured, disgraced, indecorous, scandalous etc.) as well as the idea that it is appropriate that one is seen in this way. In doing so, they conform to the definitions of shame provided in the classic treatises on the passions in a tradition that began with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle defines shame as 'a pain or disturbance in regard to bad things... which seem likely to involve us in discredit' (*Rhetoric* 1383b15), and this definition is accepted, in all essential respects, by Aquinas, Descartes and Spinoza, among many others.<sup>1</sup> That shame is concerned both with how one is and how one appears is also illustrated in a more recent observation by Nagel, who observes that 'there is a close connexion between our feelings

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<sup>1</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1a2ae, 41, 4) Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul* (§66); Spinoza, *Ethics* (Book III, proposition 58, Definitions of Emotions, 29 Explication). See also Plato, *Laws* (464eff). For an excellent general discussion of this tradition, see James (1997).

about ourselves and our feelings about others....shame and contempt, pride and admiration are internal and external sides of the same moral attitudes' (Nagel 1976, p. 149).

In light of these observations, it plausible to think of the shameful as the property of meriting a certain kind of attitude in a certain kind of subject.<sup>2</sup> If the person in question is the possessor of that property, or specially related to that person, the attitude in question will be one of shame. In an observer, the merited attitude will be one of contempt, disgust or some other attitude of disapprobation (for ease of exposition, I will follow Nagel in calling the general other-directed attitude that is 'the external side' of shame 'contempt'). This suggests that the opposite of shame is a kind of pride: a form of consciousness of oneself as admirable (e.g. Danto 1975, p. 119), where this property is understood as the property of meriting pride in its possessor (and those connected with its possessor in the relevant ways) and admiration in others.<sup>3</sup>

This way of understanding shamefulness, though *prima facie* plausible, raises a question. How is the attitude of shame related to the group of disapprobative attitudes I called 'contempt' such that they can be understood as two manifestations of a single property of shamefulness rather than manifestations of two different properties, the property of meriting a response of shame in the subject and the property of meriting a response of contempt in others? A satisfactory answer to this question is required if we are to provide an adequate understanding of the way the two aspects of shame with which I am concerned — the way in which shame manifests a concern both with how we are and with how we appear — are related. For the rest of this section, I will provide an elaboration of these aspects of shame. More specifically, I will motivate the claim that any account which fails to acknowledge one of these aspects of shame, or else denies that it is a genuine aspect of shame without further explanation, runs the risk of changing the topic: of describing something, perhaps, but something other than shame.

## 2.2. *Shame, being and value*

When, in shame, one experiences oneself as being shameful, one experiences oneself as falling short of the ideal in some respect. This is behind the common idea that shame is a moral emotion.<sup>4</sup> Levinas (2003, p.

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<sup>2</sup> Compare McDowell's (1998b, p. 143ff.) treatment of the fearful.

<sup>3</sup> This is obviously incomplete. It does not specify the 'special relation' in which one must stand to another to appropriately feel ashamed of them. In this chapter I am focusing on the experience of feeling ashamed of oneself rather than outlining a complete account of shame in all of its forms. I assume that shame of oneself is conceptually and genealogically prior to shame of another or of a group of which one is a member, and therefore that an account of it can be provided which does not make reference to these latter two phenomena. This assumption can be questioned and must therefore be defended, but this is a task for another day.

<sup>4</sup> Wollheim (1984, pp. 220-1; 1999, Ch. III), Taylor (1985, p. 54), Calhoun (2004), Thomasson (2015), Honneth (1992, p. 137) and Harcourt (2016).

63), for example, suggests that ‘on first analysis, shame appears to be reserved for phenomena of a moral order: one feel ashamed for having acted badly, for having deviated from the norm.’ This is true only insofar as the notion of ‘moral’ is interpreted broadly, as concerning any deviation from an ideal. After all, we do not only feel ashamed when we feel that we have deviated from the moral norm, but also when we deviated from other non-moral standards. One might be ashamed of their ugliness, vulgarity, awkwardness, poor sense of humour, one’s inadequacy at basic arithmetic or one’s socioeconomic background, and in the face of these experiences it is *ad hoc* to suppose, without further argument, that we must moralise these properties in order to feel them to be shameful (*contra* Quinn 1993a and Morris 2011)

Shame seems to involve the awareness of oneself as falling short of the ideal, and therefore involves the consciousness of oneself as in some sense, inadequate, defective or diminished.<sup>5</sup> This is presupposed in ordinary discourse about shame. For example, one might say ‘shame on you!’ to make someone feel ashamed of an act which we think they ought to recognise as being shameful. This is one of the tools through which children are taught to develop a sense of the admirable and the shameful, thereby developing an appreciation of the values of their community. This presupposition underlies many a rhetorical question, such as that directed by Tom Tulliver to his sister Maggie in Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*: ‘If your conduct...has been right why are you so ashamed of its being known?’ (Eliot 2003a, p. 360). This presupposition lies equally behind our strategies for alleviating shame. There are two general routes available to persuading someone that they have nothing to be ashamed about: the first is to persuade them that they lack the shameful feature in question, the second is to persuade them that the feature which they have and which they are ashamed of is not really shameful.

When one feels ashamed of oneself, one experiences oneself as falling short of the ideal. It is important to note, however, that this does not entail that we believe or judge that we have actually fallen short of the ideal. These attitudes must be distinguished to leave room for at least two possibilities.

First, we must leave room for the fact that the *feeling* of shame can itself be the experiential basis for a corresponding judgement. Upon re-reading a paper I have written, a sense of shame might lead me to revise my beliefs about what constitutes an acceptable piece of written work. To ignore this possibility is to ignore an important way in which our emotions can play a role in the formation of evaluative judgements and beliefs.

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<sup>5</sup> This idea is typically stated in terms of the ideals one accepts, one’s personal moral code or the ideals of the honour group of which one considers oneself to be a member. On the face of it, however, the experience of shame is one of simply being inadequate, and therefore as falling short of *the* ideal. The notion of one’s own personal ideal or of one’s own evaluative schema does not seem to enter into the content of the experience.

Second, it is common to feel ashamed of oneself and whilst judging that, as a matter of fact, one has not fallen short of the ideal in the relevant respect. Bartky describes some of her female students who, though they would judge that their work is good, would nevertheless act as if they were ashamed of it:

It seems to me that the demeanour of my female students in that suburban classroom bore the characteristic marks of shame, of a shame felt directly or anticipated: In their silence, the necessity for hiding and concealment; in the tentative character of their speech and in their regular apologetics, the sense of self as defective or diminished. The fear of demeaning treatment could be seen in the cringing before an Other from whom such treatment was anticipated; shame could be read even in the physical constriction of their bodies. (Bartky 1990, p. 90)

Insofar as I feel ashamed of some feature of myself, I feel it is not as it in some sense ought to be, as Bartky observes, even if, at the level of conscious judgement, I would not endorse this appraisal of myself.

The fact that shame is an experience not merely of how one appears to another but of how one actually stands in relation to some standard draws attention to some ways in which it is interestingly different from some related emotions.

First, this aspect of shame distinguishes it from embarrassment and humiliation, which are concerned exclusively with events occurring during actual social interactions (past or present), with the actual impression one takes oneself to have made on others. Shame, by contrast, is concerned with how one *is*, independently of any actual social encounter. This is reflected in the temporal character of the object of shame: it is time-general — what (or who) I am — as opposed to the occurrences of being seen and acted upon in a certain way that are the objects of embarrassment and humiliation. Though I might think some feature of myself is embarrassing or humiliating, I can only feel embarrassed or humiliated in response to some actual social occurrence. By contrast, one can feel ashamed about a some feature of oneself or one's history which one knows has never been revealed to another person.

Second, many think that shame's close connection with one's being serves to distinguish it from guilt. Shame is often distinguished from guilt in being concerned what or who one is as opposed to guilt, which is said to be concerned primarily with what one has or has not done (e.g. Morris 1976; Williams 1993; Wollheim 1999). As such, shame is less immediately connected with intentional action, desert and responsibility: I can be ashamed of things I have no control over and which might be undeserved, such as my bodily features, reactions and skin colour, my parentage,

background and so on.<sup>6</sup> I'm stuck with shame in a way that I am arguably not with guilt. It is associated with the phantasy of escaping oneself, or the desire for that person to be forgotten, by oneself and by others (this is emphasised by Levinas 2003). In shame I'm conscious of myself as a 'lesser creature' (Bartky 1990, p. 86) or as a 'shameful person' (see Morris 1976, p. 62).

That being ashamed of oneself involves feeling oneself to be shameful and therefore to deviate from the ideal seems to me to be less a substantive claim and more of a matter of how the concept of shame is identified. This is supported by ordinary discourse about shame in contrast with embarrassment and humiliation, and it has also been assumed throughout history in the classic philosophical definitions of shame. Any putative description of shame which has no place for this idea, when viewed in light of the preceding, will seem to simply be changing the topic. This is a common response to certain interpretations of Sartre's claim that 'pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that reprehensible object but, in general, of being an object' (Sartre 2018, p. 392). If this is meant to deny that shame involves any relation to value, we might reasonably wonder whether Sartre is talking about the same emotion we talk about when we use the word 'shame'. Thus we find Danto (1975, p. 118) suggesting that 'shame' has a technical meaning for Sartre. We might naturally have the same response to Velleman's account of shame, which is inspired by this reading of Sartre. Velleman (2001) argues that shame is a form of anxiety which arises in response to threats to one's status as self-presenting social agent. This naturally invites the question of why this anxiety should be understood as a form of shame, as opposed to embarrassment or humiliation — a point especially pressing given my discussion of humiliation in the preceding chapter.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Harcourt (2016, p. 105) offers the case of feeling guilty about one's inheritance to show that guilt isn't so tightly concerned with intentional and voluntary action is looser than as often supposed. Note that this is compatible with supposing that guilt, but not shame, is exclusively concerned with what one deserves, whereas shame is concerned with what one *is* regardless of whether one deserves to be this way. This allows that there is a link, it is just a looser one than is commonly supposed. If a full consideration shows even this link to be unfounded, this will not damage my argument: it will simply show that shame and guilt are more alike than initially suggested. Both will still be distinct from embarrassment and humiliation insofar as they are concerned with how one *is* rather than how one merely *appears*.

<sup>7</sup> Velleman (2001, pp. 48-9 n. 27) suggests that shame can be distinguished from embarrassment insofar as shame is a kind of anxiety whereas the latter is a kind of self-consciousness, but we are left uninformed about the difference between 'anxiety' and 'self-consciousness'. When we speak of feeling self-conscious, aren't we speaking of a specific form of social anxiety, as I argued in Chapter One? (for a thorough critique of Velleman's account, see O'Brien 2020).



### 2.3. *Shame and other people*

Shame is frequently said to be a ‘social emotion’.<sup>8</sup> Our susceptibility to shame is a product of the fact we are social creatures that seek a life in common with others of our kind and are therefore concerned with the way we are seen by these others. This is reflected in the way shame is closely associated with the feeling of being exposed to another’s gaze and, more generally, with matters of honour and reputation.

In his discussion of shame in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle recalls the Ancient Greek saying ‘shame dwells in the eyes’ (1834a35). When we are ashamed of something, we hide it from others, sometimes even from ourselves, and we fear that it will be revealed to others. This experience of exposure is described by Williams (1993, p. 89) as one in which ‘the other sees all of me and all through me’. The feeling of shame seems to be intimately connected with this experience of being exposed to another’s gaze: when we are ashamed, we either feel ourselves to be exposed to another’s gaze or, else, we are led to fear or anticipate such an experience. This is reflected in the typical response to shame. When ashamed, one hides oneself, one’s face or, more generally, the feature of oneself of which one is ashamed. We shrink from view, wishing to escape the social situation altogether, perhaps fantasising about becoming invisible. Shame also involves an aversion to eye contact. This is portrayed in literature in Cornwall’s blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear* and in Oedipus’s blinding of oneself in Sophocles’s *Oedipus The King*.<sup>9</sup>

Shame also involves a concern with the thoughts and opinions of others and, in general, with one’s reputation. Schopenhauer (2015, p. 294) as we have seen, writes that ‘there is open to man a lone a source of pleasure, and of pain as well...I refer to ambition and the feeling of honour and shame, in plain words, what he thinks of other people’s opinion of him.’ More recently, Tomasello has suggested that shame is primarily concerned with ‘my compatriots’ reputational assessment of me’ (Tomasello 2019, p. 283).

The link between the experience of shame and one’s relation to others insofar as one experiences (or fears) oneself as exposed to their gaze or as experiencing a reputational loss of face before them seems to be less a substantive view about shame and more a matter of the way in which the concept of shame is fixed. Those who insist that shame involves no reference to one’s relation to others in these respects, and particularly that one’s relation to others is not as it ought to be, those who deny that it inherently involves any desire to hide or to avoid another’s gaze, owe us an explanation of why they should not simply be taken as changing the topic. After all, we might reasonably wonder whether they are talking about shame

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<sup>8</sup> Honneth (1992, Ch. 6), Maibom (2010, p. 576), Zahavi (2014, Ch. 14), Hacker (2017, p. 206); and Bero (2020).

<sup>9</sup> See Cavell (1969b), Erikson (1977, p. 277) and Wollheim (1999, p. 188)

at all, rather than some more general notion of feeling disappointed or unhappy with oneself (compare Zahavi 2014, p. 212).

#### *2.4. Two questions*

Our interest in a philosophical account of shame derives in large part (if not exclusively) from our interest in self-understanding and our specific interest in understanding what it would be for us to live well. On this basis, we can roughly distinguish two questions we might ask about shame, one explanatory and the other normative.

‘The Explanatory Question’ asks: how are we to understand the phenomenological structure of shame and, particularly important for present purposes, the form of interpersonal self-consciousness with which it is associated? A satisfactory answer to this question must duly acknowledge both of the aspects of shame discussed above, as well as provide an answer to the question concerning the shameful raised at the end of §2.1: how are the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ sides of shamefulness such that they can be understood as two manifestations of a single property than manifestations of two distinct powers?

‘The Normative Question’, on the other hand, asks: what is the proper place of the feeling of shame in human social life, and particularly the ethical life, of a human being, understood as a self-conscious rational animal? Does it befit us, as autonomous rational agents to feel this way? Does it play a proper role in our evaluative lives or is it something we would be better off without, a kind of baggage leftover from our evolutionary past? These questions acquire force from a line of thought which, in some way or other, has led many philosophers to doubt that an approbative feeling such as shame has a proper place in the life of an autonomous rational agent. This line of thought has two strands: the first is that it is superficial to be concerned with how one appears to others (even if these appearances are accurate); the second is that this manifests a problematic form of dependence on others (for which the Kantian term is ‘heteronomy’). Calhoun (2004) characterises this line of thought as follows:

shame seems less directed at the wrong done than at how we appear, or how others will receive us, or what good or bad opinion we are entitled to have of ourselves. Thus what fuels philosophers’ suspicions about the value of feeling ashamed is the way shame seems to shift attention away from what morality requires to what other people require us to do or be like. In shame, we see ourselves through others’ eyes and measure ourselves by standards that we may not share. We take seriously the prospect of being subjected to ridicule, demeaning treatment, or social ostracism for falling short of others’ moral standards. And we fear being exposed as the less worthy beings they might take us to be. The problem with shame,

then, is that vulnerability to being shamed appears to signal the agent's failure to sustain her own autonomous judgment about what morality requires. (Calhoun 2004, p. 128)<sup>10</sup>

This line of thought, if it is to be forceful, must be backed up by a particular understanding of shame, a view of the way shame is concerned with appearance and the form of heteronomy it involves. This means, unsurprisingly, that the correct answer to The Normative Question will depend on the correct answer to The Explanatory Question. This does not mean that The Explanatory Question itself can be pursued entirely independently of The Normative Question. A satisfactory answer to the first question must explain why shame could so much as appear to be an appropriate thing for a rational agent to feel. The best course, it seems, is to address these questions *in tandem*.

### §3. The Reductive Approach

#### 3.1. *Shame and interpersonal self-consciousness*

Shame is associated with a form of interpersonal self-consciousness in which we, in some sense, 'see ourselves through the eyes of another' (e.g. Taylor 1985, p. 57). According to The Reductive Approach, we can understand this relationship of seeing oneself through the eyes of another in terms of the ontologically antecedent mental states and acts of each subject. For example, it could be claimed that when one feels ashamed one imaginatively occupies the other's third person perspective on oneself and therefore viewing oneself as one appears to others. A typical experience of shame, interpreted in this way, might involve a subject,  $x$ , imagining  $x$  from the third person perspective of another,  $y$ , all the while presupposing that 'I am  $x$ ' (see O'Brien 2011; 2020). Alternatively, it might be said that  $x$  sees that (judges, or believes) that  $y$  is aware of  $x$  from the third person point of view (all the while presupposing that he, himself, is  $x$ ) (e.g. Peacocke 2014, Ch. 10).

The Reductive Approach can take two forms depending on how one is inclined to think of the relationship between the two aspects of shame mentioned above. The Self-Evaluation View takes as its basis the idea that to feel ashamed of oneself is to feel oneself to be shameful, whereas The Social Evaluation View begins from the idea that shame is fundamentally concerned with how one is evaluated by others.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Williams (1993, p. 77-78) and Harcourt (2016, p. 102). See Introduction (2) §2.2.1-2 for an attempt to spell out each of these lines of thought in more depth.

### 3.2. *The Self-Evaluation View*

Shame, according to The Self-Evaluation View, is a form of evaluative self-consciousness in which one experiences oneself as falling short of the ideal, and therefore as not being as one, in some sense, ought to be.<sup>11</sup>

This view can be made to seem attractive by the following line of thought. There are a number of ways in which one can be unpleasantly conscious of oneself as figuring adversely in the evaluative consciousness of another person not all of which are experiences of shame. To feel ashamed of oneself in response to being seen in a negative light, therefore, is not merely to recognise, with displeasure, that one is adversely evaluated. Consider the following passage from Sartre:

this object that has appeared to the Other is not an idle image in some other's mind. Such a image could, in effect, be entirely imputed to the Other, and it could not 'touch' me. I might feel irritation or anger in relation to it, as if I were placed before a bad portrait of myself, attributing to me an ugliness or a baseness of expression that is not mine; but it would not be able to reach me at my core; inherently, shame is *recognition*. I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me... shame is an immediate shudder that runs through me from head to toe without any discursive preparation. (Sartre 2018, p. 308)

Being displeased by the way one is seen is analogous to seeing an unattractive portrait of oneself. Both might prompt a negative emotional response such as feeling upset, annoyed or indignant. In each of these cases, one's consciousness of the other's evaluation is external to one's consciousness of oneself 'from the inside'. This is not true when one feels ashamed of oneself, however. When one feels ashamed of oneself, one's consciousness of oneself from the inside, and particularly one's body is altered in reaction to the other's gaze. The bodily change in question is frequently described as one in which one feels diminished, disposed to hide oneself or the feature of oneself of which one is ashamed, and this is rooted in an experience of oneself as being shameful. One does not simply recognise that one appears shameful to another. Rather, one is conscious of oneself as shameful — one incorporates or identifies with the other's response. This seems close to what Sartre (2018, p. 308) has in mind when he observes that, in shame, 'I recognise that I am as the Other sees me'.

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<sup>11</sup> My aim in presenting this view is to capture the spirit of several views which diverge in detail and which are in some respects more sophisticated than the simple presentation I offer here. These details do not affect the objections I level against the self-evaluation view in §3.3. For different versions of The Self-Evaluation View, see Rawls (1999), Taylor (1985) and Deonna et al (2011).

Similarly, Bartky (1980, p. 85) observes that ‘unless I recognise that I am as seen by the Other, the Other’s judgement cannot cast me down.’<sup>12</sup>

If this is right, then another’s gaze affects me with shame only when their view of me is incorporated into my view of myself, insofar as, at some level, I adversely appraise myself as not being as I ought to be. Shame is a form of adverse self-evaluation: I fall short ‘in my own eyes’ A view of this sort is defended by Taylor who writes:

A person feeling shame judges herself adversely...Thinking of herself as being seen in a certain way has revealed her to herself as inferior to what she believed, assumed or hoped to be. (Taylor 1985, p. 68)

Taylor thinks the relevant form of adverse evaluation can be understood as a belief or judgement. If so, then when one is ashamed, one believes oneself to fall short of certain standards and ideals one takes to be the correct ones. This account faces a challenge in explaining instances of shame where one feels ashamed without any corresponding belief in one’s inadequacy or acceptance of the relevant standard (see Bartky 1990, p. 95). Other versions of ‘The Self-Evaluation view might avoid this difficulty by claiming that the self-evaluation in question is an experiential (or non-doxastic) appraisal of oneself as falling short of the ideal.

An apparent attraction of this view is that it seems to offer a straightforward, vindictory, answer to The Normative Question. On this view, shame is a self-directed psychological state: an experience of oneself as *shameful*. The gloss I provided on the property of shamefulness above was that if someone is shameful (or has some shameful property), then they ought to be ashamed of themselves (or that property) and others ought to view them with contempt. I also raised the question of how the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ manifestations of the property of shamefulness can be understood as manifestations of a single property, rather than manifestations of two distinct properties. The Self-Evaluation View suggests a simple answer to this question. Both of these attitudes are related insofar as they are both merited by one’s actual standing in relation to the ideal. One departs from the ideal in some specific respect, and this condition makes it appropriate for one to feel ashamed of oneself and for another to view one with an attitude of contempt. The notion of ‘the shameful’ is understood by The Self-Evaluation in a thin way as being a way

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<sup>12</sup> Complications must be introduced in describing cases in which one is seen admirably by someone one consider it to be shameful to be seen in this way by. One might feel ashamed by being admired by racists. Scheler describes a case in which a model feels shame when she realise that the artist drawing her is showing signs of arousal. The critical gaze these subjects fear is not that of the observer described — rather, they fear the gaze of a second observer, who views this as shameful position to be in. It is the view of this second observer that the shamed subject fears and identifies with (see Taylor 1985, p. 65).

of describing one's condition as falling short of the ideal: to say someone is ashamed because they apprehend themselves as shameful, then, is just an uninformative way of saying that they are ashamed of themselves because they are aware that they fall short of the ideal, that they are bad or defective. One's awareness of oneself as being bad or defective, however, is not inherently tied with one's awareness of oneself as one is seen by others. Shame, in essence, can therefore be understood as an autonomous emotional response to how one *is* in relation to the ideal, so there is nothing intrinsically heteronomous or superficial about shame as such, and therefore no good reason to deny that shame has a place in the life of a virtuous agent. A virtuous agent might not do shameful things voluntarily and yet nevertheless be susceptible to bouts of shame since shame is not exclusively bound with the notion of responsibility but with who (or what) one is. They might, for example, feel ashamed of themselves over aspects of themselves over which they have little or no control, such as their looks, their family history or for having acted in a way that unforeseeably brought about some deeply regrettable consequence.<sup>13</sup> Shame is only heteronomous, on this view, when one adversely appraises oneself for falling short of standards of the group, standards which one does not actually endorse, perhaps because one thinks one's value is determined by how one appears to others. This, however, is an incidental feature of shame, following not from its nature but from the subject's mistaken beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

### *3.3. The role of other people in The Self-Evaluation View*

This seemingly attractive feature of The Self-Evaluation View — that it presents a picture of shame as not involving any inherent concern with how one appears to another — draws attention to a problem. What seems essential to shame, on this view, is the experience of oneself as falling short of the ideal. This is not, in itself, a form of interpersonal self-consciousness, nor does it necessarily depend for its occurrence on a state of interpersonal self-consciousness. On this view, the experience of oneself 'through the eyes of another' seems to be external to the experience of shame, and therefore incidental to it. Thus, Taylor writes:

it is of course not necessary for feeling shame that the agent believe or imagine there to be some observer who views him under some description. The actual or imagined observer may merely be the means of making the agent look at himself, he is in no way essential. What is essential is the shift in the agent's viewpoint *vis-à-vis* himself. (Taylor 1985, p. 66)

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Williams's discussions of moral luck (Williams 1981; see also Williams 1993).

<sup>14</sup> A view of this sort can be found in Epictetus. For references, see Introduction (2) footnote 7.

This is a surprising consequence. After all, as we saw in §2.3, shame seemed to be intimately connected with the way one is seen by others, for example, in the way it motivates one to avoid eye contact with others, to retreat from their view and to fear that one's shameful features or one's shameful history will be exposed. Shame seems to be inherently connected with anxiety concerning one's life with others (Deigh 1983 p. 238; Calhoun 2004, p. 131-2). The Self-Evaluation View owes us an explanation of these common judgements (or 'intuitions') about shame which is compatible with the idea that they are, strictly speaking, merely contingent features of the experience itself.

Taylor tries to explain our tendency to appeal to the notion of an audience in shame by construing it as a metaphorical device for explaining the shift of a subject's perspective on herself that is characteristic of shame. When one comes to feel ashamed of oneself, one's perspective on oneself shifts from an immersed first person perspective to the third person perspective of a detached observer. The idea of being seen, then, is at best a common cause of shame and, if Taylor is right, provides only a convenient means of describing the subject's shift of perspective on herself. However, this is not sufficient to satisfactorily explain the way in which shame is concerned with the way one is seen by others. To further illustrate the inadequacy of The Self-Evaluation View, we ought to consider a good example of shame. I will consider two excellent descriptions of shame provided by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The central images of *The Scarlet Letter* are images of shame, images of avoidance and exposure, of exclusion and public condemnation. The novel recounts the aftermath of the revelation of an affair between Hester Prynne and a man whose identity remains unknown who we find out is the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, a man beloved by his parishioners, the very people who subject Hester Prynne to a regimented pattern of public shaming, from requiring her to stand on the pillory in the marketplace every day, to requiring her to wear the eponymous scarlet letter as a mark of her shame. I am interested in the emotional responses to these events felt by Hester and Arthur, both identifiable as shame, which differ in that Hester's is a shame publicly suffered whereas Arthur's eats away at him in private. Importantly, neither of these cases is persuasively described in terms of The Self-Evaluation View.

At first glance, it might seem as if Hester Prynne's shame is conducive to The Self-Evaluation View. We are, after all, given little indication to doubt that insofar as she feels ashamed of herself, she feels herself to be bad or defective. The important question for present purposes, however, is whether this account makes sense of Hester's orientation towards others even when she at some level shares their view of her as being defective in important respects. Taylor's explanation of the role of an audience — as characterising a shift in perspective on herself — might characterise some aspects of Hester's experience. On occasion, she might be going about her life,

immersed in her charitable activities and, for a short time, forget the defective person that she is, only for her eyes to be opened by the shame-inducing gaze of another. What is unconvincing, however, is that this exhausts the way the other is involved in shame. There is good reason to doubt this. Consider, the following passage:

Another peculiar torture was felt in the gaze of a new eye. When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter — and none ever failed to do so, they branded it afresh into Hester's soul...But then again, an accustomed eye likewise had its own anguish to inflict. From first to last, in short, Hester Prynne had always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token; the spot never grew callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with each daily torture. (Hawthorne 2007, p. 69)

Two points can be made in connection with this passage.

First, on Taylor's interpretation, we should think of the other's gaze as causing Hester to take a third person perspective on herself. But the salient object of Hester's attention in this example is not herself, as seen from the third person perspective of another. Rather, she is focused on the piercing gaze of the other and only implicitly or 'pre-reflectively' conscious of herself as being the person looked at. She is conscious of the other's gaze as excluding her or otherwise separating her from the other. This seems to be a central aspect of what she is trying to avoid in avoiding eye contact. On the face of it, to experience oneself as shameful (before another's gaze or in private) inherently involves an orientation, not just to the ideal, but to the possibility of exposure to the eyes of another.

Second, if Hester's relation to the observer is merely incidental to her experience of shame, which itself consists in the awareness that she is defective, wouldn't the natural response to the exposure of the shameful feature in question be for her to focus on herself, bringing, where possible, her features into alignment with what she takes to be the ideal rather than concerning herself with her relation to others, in desiring to hide from their gaze or by avoiding eye contact with them? Perhaps this point could be countered by saying that we engage in these avoidant behaviours because it is easier to avoid reminders of our defects than it is to make ourselves less defective in the relevant respects. It is not plausible, however, that when Hester hopes that others will forget about her history she hopes for this just because she wants to forget about the supposedly bad things she has done. It is clear that she wants others to forget so that she can establish a more desirable form of connection with others and live a more desirable life in her community. Consider, in support of this, the following description of the way Hester Prynne is affected by the stances others adopt towards her:



In her intercourse with the society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact implied and often expressed that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind...The poor, as we have already said, whom she sought out to be the objects of her bounty, often reviled the hand that was stretched forth to succor them. Dames of elevated rank, likewise, whose doors she entered in the way of her occupation, were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart; sometimes through that alchemy of quiet malice, by which women can concoct a subtle poison from ordinary trifles; and sometimes, also, by a coarser expression, that fell upon the sufferer's defenceless breast like a rough blow upon an ulcerated wound. (Hawthorne 2007, p. 67-68)

According to The Self-Evaluation View, these features of shame — the way it manifests our concern for connection with others and constitutes a kind of exclusion or separation from others, the way in which it is intimately linked with the experience of being exposed to the other's gaze — are all merely incidental features of shame. This seemed unsatisfactory to begin with and this dissatisfaction has been further supported by our consideration of the case of Hester Prynne. These considerations can be bolstered further still by considering the shame felt by Arthur Dimmesdale. Since his shame is suffered in private, and he is free from the shame-inducing punishments of his parishioners, his shame might initially seem conducive to The Self-Evaluation View. But it is not. Consider the following passage, where Arthur speaks of his shame to Hester:

Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am! Had I one friend... to whom when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even thus much of truth would save me! But now it is all falsehood! — all emptiness! — all death! (Hawthorne 2007, p. 150).

Despite these assertions, Arthur is terrified of exposure. It is described by Hawthorne as 'the anguish of his life' and, yet, despite this, the possibility of exposure is said to make him feel 'a strange joy'. Though he is viewed as a saint by his community, he sees himself as 'the vilest all sinners', as corrupt, degraded and vicious. His shame creates the burden of living in

secrecy, of never being able to make his true self known to them. He is utterly unable to identify with the image others have of him, and therefore unable to share his life with them. The ‘strange joy’ he feels at exposure is an anticipation of his being freed of this burden: not simply the burden of having to deceive people, on the basis of which he might adversely evaluate himself, but the burden of maintaining his relation with others on the wrong foot, of not being able to live openly with them, and of never being seen as he sees himself as being.<sup>15</sup> The Self-Evaluation View would compel us to view all of these features as being incidental to shame, which must be viewed in terms of Arthur’s experience of himself as falling short of the ideal.

These points reinforce the idea, described in §2.3, that shame is inherently concerned with one’s life with others. In describing a form of adverse self-evaluation to which this relationship is merely incidentally related, The Self Evaluation View might succeed in describing some feeling, perhaps of unhappiness with oneself or disappointment with oneself, but it fails to describe the experience of shame.<sup>16</sup>

#### *3.4. The Social Evaluation View.*

Considerations of this sort have led some to find attractive the view that shame is a form of interpersonal self-consciousness in which one is conscious of oneself as being adversely evaluated by another. This experience might be understood in terms of the following conditions, provided by O’Brien (2011):

- (i) I am aware of a person, A, from the third person perspective of another person, B.
- (ii) I am aware that I myself am A.
- (iii) I am conscious of A as being adversely evaluated by B

This basic framework can vary across a number of dimensions, for example, it might vary on the basis of the weight the subject places on the particular evaluator or the evaluative schema, on the form of awareness involved (e.g. perception, imagination, or belief), as O’Brien observes in the following passage:

If...I come to judge that I, as a person, am failing to meet the approval of the evaluator and care sufficiently about the evaluator (whether I also weight their evaluative schema or not), I may feel

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<sup>15</sup> Arthur undoubtedly has many reasons to feel adversely about himself. My aim in describing his case at such length is not to show that The Self-Evaluation View cannot say why he feels ashamed. Rather, it is to remind the reader of how much The Self-Evaluation View seems to leave out.

<sup>16</sup> As Gibbard (1990) observes, just as guilt is not anger directed at oneself, so shame is not self-contempt or self-disdain.

shame. I may come to feel either, what we can call, *identifying shame* — shame in which I identify with the values by which I am judged or — *non-identifying shame* — shame in which I do not identify with the values by which I am judged. (O'Brien 2011, pp. 116-117)

Let's grant, for the sake of argument, that a position offered along these lines succeeds in avoiding the difficulties facing The Self-Evaluation View. Nevertheless, it must address two questions which arise in connection with those aspects of shame which initially make the view seem plausible.<sup>17</sup>

First, (i)-(iii) alone do not suffice for a convincing explanation of shame. Shame is not merely an unpleasant form of awareness of oneself from the adversely evaluating third person perspective of another, nor the unpleasant recognition *that* one is adversely evaluated by another. In §3.2 we saw that this experience is analogous, in some respects at least, to seeing an unflattering portrait of oneself painted by another. In both cases we are aware of ourselves as we appear from an observer's perspective; and in each case the painful emotional reaction might equally have taken the form of anger, sadness or irritation. When we are ashamed, however, we are not merely conscious of ourselves as *appearing* to be shameful, but of actually *being* shameful. In particular, shame is inherently connected with the idea that we fall short of the ideal. As noted in §2, any adequate account of shame must give this aspect of shame the attention it is due or risk changing the topic (perhaps by describing some related form of interpersonal self-consciousness).

An account of this form must also address The Normative Question — this is the second challenge. If shame is really concerned with the way we appear to others, not merely insofar as this has certain consequences or insofar as this attention provides the epistemic resources for self-knowledge, but for its own sake, we might wonder what place it ought to have in the life of an autonomous rational agent. After all, it seems to manifest a superficial concern with mere appearances and an immature dependence on others — a tendency of seeing 'with other men's eyes', as Locke put it (*Essay*, I. VI. 23). One might think this is a suitable tendency for the young and immature, those who must assume virtue because they

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<sup>17</sup> Though O'Brien's (2011) discussion of shame is compatible with The Reductive Approach, and therefore the resources outlined in her paper are available to a reductive theorist, I do not mean to suggest that O'Brien herself commits to the reductive approach in that paper (cp. Chapter One, footnote 5). In a more recent work, O'Brien has enriched this position with the addition of the idea that shame involves a diminishment of one's 'social magnitudes' (see O'Brien 2020). The resulting 'Social Diminution Model' is outlined in a programmatic way, and whether or not it can be acknowledged by The Reductive Approach will depend on the substance of O'Brien's theory of social magnitudes, an account of which are to be offered elsewhere. If the account remains within the constraints of The Reductive Approach, I think it will face some of the difficulties that I will level against The Social Evaluation View. It is more likely, however, that this will take the form of a rejection of The Reductive Approach as applied to shame. Since my aim is not to show that The Transactional Approach is the *only* alternative to The Reductive Approach, O'Brien's more recent account of shame, I will defer my consideration of this model for another occasion.

lack it, in the hope that one day they will acquire it. It is not, however, an appropriate tendency in the mature, those who ought to have their own conception of the good, the true and the beautiful, acting and judging autonomously on this basis rather than on the basis of the likely reactions of others and opinions of others.

### 3.5. *Calhoun on shame and social practices*

A response to these challenges on behalf of The Social Evaluation View can be found in a recent paper by Calhoun. Calhoun (2004) can be read as defending a version of 'The Social Evaluation View' according to which it is be a sign of 'moral maturity' for one to feel ashamed in response to another's adverse evaluation of one, even if one thinks that this adverse evaluation is mistaken. According to Calhoun, a mature moral agent gives the opinions of others what she calls 'practical weight'. It is appropriate for us to feel shame (as opposed to 'social discomfort') in response to these evaluations because they define 'who we are' within a shared social practice of morality (2004, p. 138). This is important to us and is a manifestation of maturity rather than immature, Calhoun argues, because it constitutes the proper recognition that we (i.e. the subject feeling shame and the one evaluating them) are co-participants in a 'shared social practice of morality'. This social practice generates shared understandings about what is obligatory and what is supererogatory, as well as when our basic moral obligations are fulfilled. This view is summarised in the following paragraph:

Shaming criticisms work by impressing upon the person that she has disappointed not just one individual's expectations but what some "we" expected of her...The power to shame is a function of our sharing a moral practice with the shamer and recognizing that the shamer's opinion expresses a *representative viewpoint* within that practice. The shamer's opinion tells us who we are for any number of co-participants within a social practice of morality that we take ourselves to be a part of. Shaming criticisms have, in this sense, practical weight. (Calhoun 2004, p. 140-1)

This account is therefore directly designed to address the second challenge, of explaining how shame could so much as seem to be an appropriate thing for a mature rational agent to feel insofar as it is intrinsically concerned with the way one is seen by another.

Let us say that a 'shaming-criticism' is one which is intended by the agent to make one feel ashamed of oneself on the basis of something one has done or some feature one has. We can grant to Calhoun that a mature ethical agent, in giving practical weight to the opinions of others in their community, will thereby be vulnerable to being displeased, upset or uncomfortable insofar as they are subjected to the shaming-criticisms of these others, if these criticisms reveal an opinion about one which is

representative of one's community. If we want to, we can describe these responses to shaming-criticisms instances of 'feeling shamed' — insofar as these are ways of recognising, in an affectively laden way, that one is being shamed by others. It is a sign of moral maturity to be upset in this way by being the object of another's shaming-criticism because the opinion they thereby reveal determines 'who one is' by the lights of those who hold the evaluative perspective that is typical of one's community.

None of this entails that such an agent ought to feel shame in response to such a shaming-criticism, and we have good reason to resist this idea. After all, there is good reason to think that when we feel ashamed of ourselves, we feel ourselves to *be* rather than to merely *appear* to be shameful. This suggests that we ought only to feel ashamed of ourselves in response to another's shame-inducing criticism when we are seen as we are. This is what Bartky (1980, p. 85) had in mind when she suggested that 'unless I recognise that I am as seen by the Other, the Other's judgement cannot cast me down'. As I mentioned above, Calhoun seeks to offer an account of the appropriateness of shame which applies to cases where one may or not agree with or identify with the adverse evaluation of the other — not merely in one's beliefs, but also in one's feelings.<sup>18</sup> So the experience is envisaged as one in which one experiences oneself as appearing in some way to another but, *contra* Sartre and Bartky, one does not recognise that one is as one appears to be. Calhoun's account therefore runs head on into the first challenge. What can be said in its favour?

Perhaps this challenge can be met by elaborating on the idea that, when we feel shame in response to the shaming criticism of another, we do so because this reveals the representative viewpoint of our community, and that this thereby 'tells us who *we are* for any number of co-participants' (Calhoun 2004, p. 140-1, emphasis added). Perhaps this can provide Calhoun with the resources to make sense of the idea that shame is not merely concerned with how we *appear* but with how we *are*. Shame is not a response to any adversely-evaluating appearance or opinion, but only those which reveal 'who we are' for an indefinitely large number of participants in the ethical practice of which we are a part. In shame, then, we are conscious of the shameful person 'who we are' for an indefinite majority of my co-participants in some evaluative social practice.

Even if we grant that Calhoun is entitled to this talk of 'who we are', any approach along these lines faces a serious problem. Consider the form of secret shame felt by Arthur Dimmesdale which I described in §3.3. Arthur is deeply ashamed of himself, he thinks himself an abominable sinner and at least part of this has to do with his illicit affair with Hester and the daughter that it produced. Arthur is ashamed of who he is and of what he has done, yet his shame is not unconnected with his relation to others: he is deeply aware that he lives his life on the wrong foot with others, is unable to share

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<sup>18</sup> See for example, her summary (Calhoun 2004 pp. 135-137).

his community's rosy view of him as being like a saint just as they are unable to share his view that he is 'the vilest of sinners'. Calhoun's version of The Social Evaluation View fares no better than The Self Evaluation View in accommodating Dimmesdale's shame. After all, the *actual* representative viewpoint of Arthur — 'who he is' in that moral practice — is one which sees him as a great man whose presence is a boon to the community.

At this stage, it is tempting to offer one of two responses on Calhoun's behalf, neither of which is compelling. The first response is to say that Arthur anticipates 'who he will be' in his moral practice once his true identity is revealed. This is unsatisfactory because Arthur's shame is not primarily future-oriented. He experiences himself as *being* shameful, rather than merely of being afraid of appearing to be shameful in the future.<sup>19</sup> The second response is to claim that Arthur imagines being seen or seeing himself through the eyes of an imaginary observer who sees him as he is. The problem facing this strategy, however, is that the logic of Calhoun's position only entails that this would determine 'who he is' in an imaginary moral practice he shares with this imaginary observer, so this approach cannot accommodate Arthur's sense that he is a shameful person. There is little reason, therefore, to think that Calhoun's account of shame can provide the resources for The Social Evaluation View to meet either of the challenges raised at the end of §3.4.

### 3.6. *The Social-Self-Evaluation View.*

A final line of defence for The Reductive Approach would be to restrict the experience of shame to what O'Brien calls cases of 'identifying shame'. To feel ashamed of oneself is an experience in which one either (a) experiences oneself from the third person adversely evaluating perspective of another or (b) sees that another is adversely evaluating one, and that one recognises that one is as one is seen by the other. Thus shame is understood as a complex state of interpersonal self-consciousness. An adverse self-evaluation is necessary but not sufficient for shame — only adverse self-evaluations which arise as a part of a larger experience of seeing oneself through the eyes of another count as experiences of shame.<sup>20</sup>

There at least two issues with this approach.

First, this approach is *ad hoc*. It states that shame, in effect, consists in the conjunction of two constitutively independent psychological states, the state

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to deny the fact that one's sense of shame — what is sometimes described as one's shame, for short — is concerned with the future and, particularly, involves a fear of being seen in a dishonourable light. This seems to be the sense of 'shame' which Aristotle's describes as 'a kind of fear of dishonour' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1128b9-12).

<sup>20</sup> A view of this sort is one way of interpreting Zahavi's (2014) claim that shame has a self-evaluation component and a social evaluation component. An account of this sort will be unsatisfactory for those, such as Calhoun (2004), who reject The Self-Evaluation View because they want to make room for the claim that one can appropriately feel shame in response to another's opinion even in the absence of a corresponding self-evaluation. I have omitted this objection because I think it is inadequate, my reasons for this are discussed in §5.4.

of seeing oneself through the eyes of someone who adversely evaluates one and a state of adverse self-evaluation. This account insists that both of these states are required in order to make sense of the way shame is concerned both with how one stands in relation to the ideal and also with how one stands in the eyes of others, but this account is unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of how this complex of psychological states constitutes an interestingly unified psychological category. In response to an account of this form, Stout (2015, p. 635-6) rightly points out that ‘this makes shame seem like an artificial concept, dividing off the space of human experience in an *ad hoc* way.’ In essence, it is unable to satisfactorily address the question posed in the penultimate paragraph of §2.1: if we understand the property of shamefulness as the property of meriting a response of shame in the subject and a feeling of contempt in an observer, what grounds do we have for thinking that this property — the shameful — is an interestingly unified property rather than being a marker for two distinct, contingently related, properties?<sup>21</sup>

A second issue is specific to a version of this view which understands the role of the other in terms of claim (b) above. This is a claim according to which one’s experience of shame involves one imaginatively occupying the third person perspective of another whose adverse evaluation one identifies with. This form of shame is what O’Brien describes in conditions (i)-(iii) and in the passage quoted as a form of identifying shame. Like O’Brien’s discussion of ordinary self-consciousness this faces two issues owing to the fact it suggests that in shame one simultaneously occupies two perspectives on oneself. This can be most easily seen by considering what Sartre calls ‘the primary structure of shame’ — the case where one feels ashamed whilst being under another’s gaze. First, there is the issue that this mischaracterises the object of one’s attention in shame: when we feel ashamed, the focus of our attention is not on ourselves, as seen from the third person perspective of the other, but on the other, and particularly their gaze; it is that, after all, which I seek to avoid in avoiding eye contact, that from which I seek to hide in hiding my face or my body. Second, there is the issue that in shame, I am not merely conscious of myself as I appear to the other from the outside, rather, my consciousness of the other’s gaze transforms my inner awareness of my body. In particular, I am conscious of the other’s gaze as inducing or intensifying my shame, and this is interdependent with my awareness of my body as affected by the other’s gaze — it feels different, in a way which is difficult to describe adequately other than saying that it feels ‘exposed’ to the other’s gaze. This cannot be understood in terms of my holding two

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<sup>21</sup> For similar reasons it is also unsatisfactory to distinguish, as philosophers sometimes do, between ‘moral shame’ (which corresponds to The Self Evaluation View) and ‘social shame’ (which can be understood in terms of The Social Evaluation View). The reason for this is that paradigmatic instances of shame involve both one’s awareness of one’s relation to others and one’s relation to some ideal or standard. As Anscombe (2000, §1 p. 1) observes: ‘when we are tempted to think of “different senses” of a word which is clearly not equivocal, we may infer that we are pretty much in the dark about the character of the concept it represents.’

perspectives together at the same time, my embodied first person perspective which is directed towards the other's gaze and my occupation of the other's third person perspective on me, because the experience of feeling ashamed before another does not seem to involve the occupation of two perspectives. Rather, I only occupy one perspective: I am conscious of myself as shameful insofar as I am conscious of the other's gaze as affecting me in a particular kind of way (compare Sartre 2018, p. 309).<sup>22</sup>

#### §4. The Challenge

The challenge facing The Reductive Approach is to provide an account of shame which is able to make sense both of the way in which shame seems characteristically concerned with how one actually stands in relation to a standard insofar as it consists, in part, in feeling oneself to be shameful, and which can also do justice to the way in which shame is characteristically concerned with the way one is seen by others. I have argued that The Reductive Approach oscillates between two positions, The Self Evaluation View and The Social Evaluation View, each of which seems attractive only when viewed in the light of the defects of the other, and neither of which is ultimately satisfactory. The Self-Evaluation View, as we have seen, promises to do justice to the way in which shame is concerned with how *I am* and is unable to do justice to the way shame is concerned with how I *appear* to others. The Social Evaluation View, by contrast, seeks to do justice to the way shame seems concerned with how I *appear* to others, but is unable to justice to the idea that when I feel ashamed of myself, I am conscious of myself *as shameful*. Nor can this difficulty be avoided simply by combining these views into a 'Social Self Evaluation View'.

Wollheim (1999) has outlined a sophisticated account of shame which promises to avoid these difficulties. According to Wollheim, shame consists in a relation to another, but not another person. Rather, it consists in a relation to an internalised other, an internal object that is internal to the working of one's psyche and therefore is uniquely positioned to make sense of the way shame involves *both* the awareness that one is not as one ought to be and yet is nevertheless concerned with the way one is related to another.<sup>23</sup> Wollheim's motivation for bringing to bear this theoretical apparatus is that it's the only way to make sense of how another could have

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<sup>22</sup> These objections as applied to O'Brien's account of ordinary self-consciousness, of which she thinks shame is a variant, are stated in more depth in Chapter One §3.2-§3.3. They apply to equally to versions of The Self-Evaluation View and The Social View which seek to explain the intrinsically other-focused aspect of shame in terms of the occupation of another's third person perspective.

<sup>23</sup> The psychoanalytic theory of internal objects is the only well-developed way to understand the frequently espoused and seldom defended claim that shame involves a relation to an 'internalised other' (e.g. Bartky 1990; Williams 1993), where this is neither a longwinded way of talking about how one judges oneself to be or how one expects others to respond to one.



the ‘special authority’ characteristic of the criticising agency in shame, though he acknowledges that his account diverges from the common-sense phenomenology of shame insofar as he treats my feeling of shame before an internalised other as the explanatorily primary case of shame whereas my feeling of shame before an actual other is viewed as secondary. For the rest of this chapter, I will pursue an alternative strategy. I will argue that the difficulties facing The Reductive Approach give us a good reason to change directions, one which understands shame in terms of The Transactional Approach that I have been outlining throughout this thesis.

## §5. A Transactional Account of Shame

### *5.1. Shame, connection and concealment*

According to each of the views considered in §3, shame concerns our relations to others primarily insofar as it manifests our concern with how we *appear* to others. However, an alternative conception is available according to which shame is concerned with our relations to others primarily insofar as it manifests our concern with establishing forms of interpersonal communion with others and only secondarily with the way we appear to others, it being concerned with the latter insofar as the way we appear makes certain forms of communion possible and precludes others. I will provide an outline of this approach within The Transactional Approach that I have been developing throughout this thesis.

Of all the self-conscious emotions, shame initially seems to be the least amenable to a transactional account. Interpersonal transactions as I understand them are transactions which occur between at least two individuals whereas shame, unlike embarrassment and humiliation, is something which can be felt even where there is no actual transaction (past or present) between oneself and another. This ensures that a transactional account of shame will be more complex than one of either of these other affective experiences. The account I offer falls into three parts.

I begin by providing a transactional account of the most fundamental way in which we are affected by the other’s gaze in shame, which makes the more sophisticated experience of shame possible. This experience, which I will call ‘proto-shame’, is a specific way of being affected by another’s attention when the other is adopting what I call a ‘distancing stance’ towards one in response to some feature of one or some act one has performed (5.2).

The feeling of shame can be understood on this basis. To be ashamed of oneself is to experience oneself as being shameful. We can elucidate the property of being shameful, in the first instance, as the property of meriting the proto-shame-inducing attention described in §5.2. This is a response-dependent property: a property one actually possesses but which is

internally connected to the responses of others (§5.3). This constitutes my answer to The Explanatory Question.

From this perspective, I argue that the arguments which motivated The Normative Question rest on a non-mandatory and phenomenologically problematic conception of shame. This results in a more nuanced view of the place of shame in human ethical life than that of The Self Evaluation View or The Social Evaluation View (§5.4)

### 5.2. *Proto-shame*

Sartre (2018, p. 308) writes that ‘shame in its primary structure is shame *before somebody*.’ Though the experience of shame does not require the presence of an observer, it can only be adequately described with reference to the possibility of being seen (or otherwise attended to), and thereby affected, by another in a particular way. Sartre’s sensible thought is that this way of being affected by another’s gaze is both developmentally and ontologically prior to the feeling of shame proper. We might therefore call the former ‘proto-shame’, reserving the term ‘shame’ for the latter.<sup>24</sup>

Recall that the experience of feeling self-conscious before another’s gaze involved a kind of anxiety, an anxiety evoked by one’s lack of awareness of where one stands with another. Proto-shame is importantly different in this regard. It involves someone adopting a specific kind of self-distancing stance in response to one. Proto-shame can be understood as a way of being acted upon by the other’s gaze which, as with ordinary self-consciousness, is experienced as transforming one’s practical situation, bodily self-consciousness and emotional comportment in a specific way (it is important to note, however, that these three transformations cannot be completely disentangled from one another).

The other’s gaze is experienced as transforming my practical situation. When another person looks at me, we have seen, I am necessitated to respond to them in some way, but in this case I am aware of the possible ways in which one can respond as being limited insofar as the other, in expressing disdain, contempt or disgust in response to me is adopting what we might call a ‘distancing stance’ towards me, a proneness to avoid interaction with me in response to some feature of mine or some act that I have performed.<sup>25</sup> This stance expresses the other’s adverse evaluation of me and might take the form of an act of withdrawal, an expression of reluctance to interact with me or a rebuke. I am conscious that this aspect or act constitutes an obstacle to a desirable form of communion with the

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<sup>24</sup> If we wanted to stay closer to Sartre’s formulation the same distinction could be described as ‘the primary structure of shame’ and ‘the secondary structure of shame’. The terminology I have chosen to adopt has the advantage of enabling me to more clearly distinguish between proto-shame, the feeling of shame and the experience of feeling ashamed before another.

<sup>25</sup> The relevance of avoidant and exclusionary forms of treatment of this sort are deeply connected with our sense of what is shameful and is expressed when we think, in a primitive way, of the shameful as a pollution or a stain. This is discussed by Adkins (1960, Ch. V) and, in passing, by Charles Taylor (2016, p. 166-7).

other, something which must be struggled against if such a communion is to be achieved.<sup>26</sup> I therefore find myself in a practical situation in which I stand in a subordinated relation to the other, I find a certain kind of communion with them desirable and I am thereby pained by the distancing-stance they are adopting towards me in response to some feature of mine or some act I have performed.

In a practical situation of this sort, three kinds of possible response are liable to become salient: avoidance, appeasement and aggression. Which of these becomes most salient will depend on one's character and one's relationship with the other person.

(i) *Avoidance*. First, I might find myself prone to avoid the other's attention, whether by hiding myself, my face or my other relevant features from their gaze. Eye contact in particular is avoiding insofar as it involves making mutually manifest both that I have this feature or that I have performed this act and that I stand in this subordinated position in relation to the other. This will be a matter of common knowledge between us, that much is unavoidable; but it is nonetheless desirable to avoid openly acknowledging this, insofar as doing so leaves little practical space for pretending that this is not so, perhaps with the hope that we both might forget about it. Once this becomes 'out in the open' between us, however, this becomes not only a part of our own narrative self-understanding, but also a part of our joint-narrative with another, and thereby a feature of our shared history.<sup>27</sup>

Insofar as the experience of proto-shame involves feeling oneself to stand in a subordinated position in relation to another, one will be prone to hide one's feeling of proto-shame insofar as its revelation will amplify one's subordination. This is true of shame in general: when one feels ashamed about something one is likely to also feel ashamed of one's shame, if it is revealed to another, just as one's blush further when someone recognises that one is blushing. However, any response in which one seeks to escape the gaze of another is likely to betray one's shame. This in turn motivates fantasies which can be grouped together insofar as they all involve abdications of my social agency: fantasies of escaping the situation in which I'm stuck, of being necessitated to respond. This might take the form of becoming invisible, of being swallowed up by the group, or as Bernard Williams (1993, p. 89) suggests, of fantasising 'that the space occupied by me should be instantaneously empty'. Note that all of these fantasies are fantasies of *passive escape* — they want to be out of the situation without escaping, since escaping will amplify their shame.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This notion of 'communion' refers to the harmonious form of shared experiences introduced in Chapter Three §§5-6.

<sup>27</sup> I have described this form of mutual manifestness in terms of the transactional approach in Chapter Two (§5.3) and Chapter Three (§5).

<sup>28</sup> Compare Chapter One §4.3

(ii) *Appeasement*. Alternatively, I might become prone to respond deferentially and apologetically, bowing my head and adopting a deferential comportment towards the other. In this instance, acknowledging one's position can be a means of acknowledging the act or defect that is the cause of the other's distancing-stance and thereby signalling one's willingness to change it. This is an effort to restore the form of communion to which the other's distancing-stance constitutes a disruption.

(iii) *Aggression*. Finally, rather than appeasing the other, one might seek to put an end to their shame-inducing attention. This happens in *King Lear*, for example, when Cornwall blinds Gloucester (see Cavell 1969b; Wollheim 1999).<sup>29</sup> This is the basis for associated episodes of aggressive phantasy (typically after the event) described by Erikson (1977, p. 277) when he observed that '[h]e who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world.'<sup>30</sup> The aggressive response in question might be motivated by a desire to extricate oneself from the subordinated position in which one stands to the other by subordinating them in turn.

One's awareness of one's practical situation is interdependent with one's awareness of one's body. Because of this, the transformation of one's practical situation is also a transformation of one's bodily self-consciousness: one's body will feel different insofar as it is prone to respond in one of the ways outlined above, whether it be to hide, to appease oneself or to respond with aggression. This might result, for example, in one's feeling 'diminished', in feeling small insofar as one is prone to shrink away from view. One might feel oneself or some aspect of oneself to be 'exposed' to view. Hester Prynne, for example, is frequently described as feeling the scarlet letter 'burning' on her breast when someone looks at it, and of having to wilfully forbear from her inclination to hide it.

Finally, one's apprehension of the other's gaze transforms one's emotional comportment towards the other. One will have an unpleasant experience of the other as distancing themselves from one, and therefore will feel excluded, an unpleasant experience resulting from the other's reluctance to engage in a desirable form of interpersonal communion with one. This might be described as a feeling of separation or alienation from the other, an experience in which one is conscious of some feature of oneself as being the cause of the other's reaction to one.

To summarise, then, we can describe proto-shame as a way of being affected by another's attentive comportment to one — their gaze and the distancing-stance they adopt towards one — which is experienced as a

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<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum (2004, p. 209-10) and Thomason (2015) discuss other forms of shame-induced rage.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to these three responses of the subject who is ashamed of oneself, there is a fourth response to a shame-inducing gaze, which is to resist their gaze and the reaction of shame it seeks to induce: we might do so by meeting their gaze head on, and holding it until they feel self-conscious or ashamed.

transformation of one's practical situation, bodily self-consciousness and emotional comportment. This form of self-conscious awareness of the other, however, cannot be broken down into two ontologically antecedent particulars: what the other is experienced as doing and what I experienced myself as undergoing.

### 5.3. *Shame*

When we feel ashamed of ourselves, we feel ourselves to be shameful. We can understand the property of shamefulness as being, in the first instance, the property of meriting the form of proto-shame-inducing distancing stance just outlined. Thus 'shamefulness' can be understood as a response-dependent property: it is a property its possessor has independently of any particular individual's response, but it is nevertheless a property that is internally related to the responses of others.<sup>31</sup> A subject becomes capable of feeling ashamed of themselves when they become capable of recognising that they merit the kind of distancing-stance described in §5.2. But once they become aware of this, they also become aware that their feeling of shame itself is itself merited by the property of shamefulness and they thereby come to a greater appreciation of the property of shamefulness. This answers one of the question addressed in §5.1: how can we regard the shameful, understood as the property of meriting a feeling of shame in its possessor and a feeling of contempt in another as a single property, as opposed to two independent properties. We have explained why the feeling of shame and the distancing stance the other adopts in expressing contempt are, as Nagel puts it, two 'sides' of a single phenomenon: they are both manifestations of the property of shamefulness. In a mature ethical agent, the gaze which induces proto-shame, also induces (or intensifies) the feeling of shame.

This account, therefore, is able to accommodate both aspects of shame highlighted in §2, both the way shame is concerned with our awareness of ourselves as *being* shameful, and the way shame is concerned with the way we are seen by others. The property of shamefulness is the property of meriting a certain form of distancing-stance, which is expressive of another's adverse evaluation, and the basis for this evaluation will be some feature of the shameful person that falls short of the ideal. It can also do justice to the case of Hester Prynne, whose shame is so clearly bound with the painful experience of being seen, as well as the case of Arthur Dimmesdale, who, though never subject to the shame-inducing treatment of others, nevertheless is conscious of himself as shameful and therefore of meriting this kind of proto-shame-inducing treatment.

This account has its place in a wider view of human ethical life which is understood as an ethical life with others. We grow up in a social world with others, and develop a sense of the admirable and the shameful, the beautiful

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Wiggins (1987) and McDowell (1998a; 1998b). See Morris (2011) for a different description of shame, as treated by Sartre, in terms of response-dependent properties.

and the ugly, through our interactions with parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies. In the first instance, we find ourselves experiencing proto-shame, before coming to recognise that the other's reactions to us which induce proto-shame are merited by properties and acts which merit this kind of response. Once we are in a position to recognise this, we are also in a position to see that these features and acts merit the response of shame on our own part. We thereby learn what is shameful by being subject to proto-shame-inducing (and, once internalisation has begun, shame-inducing) forms of attention. Shaming practices vary from society to society: they will include certain forms of gazing, speech acts and, more generally, forms of ridicule — all of which constitute what I have called a 'distancing-evaluative stance'.<sup>32</sup> Gradually, they come to avoid certain features, not just because it generates an displeasing response in others, but because the acts and features in question are themselves shameful (i.e. because they are such to merit disgrace or contempt by others in our community, and thereby threaten estrangement from others). As Lear observes:

it is through training and habituation that a person's character is shaped— in particular, the character and outlook of a virtuous person. This outlook is deeply ingrained, and it is psychologically stable. Such a person will have not only a view of what is excellent, noble, and fine—but also a view of what is shameful. This view is not just a view: it is a psychologically ingrained nexus of perception and motivation. (Lear 2006, p. 63)

Children come to recognise that some acts and properties are shameful and others are admirable. The shameful and the admirable are experienced as genuine features of the acts or features in question and therefore are a part of the fabric of the world in which one lives. This sense of what is honourable and what is shameful is shared, to some extent, by one's community, and thereby facilitates the forms of harmonious sharing experience which I have described as a kind of interpersonal 'communion'. In a similar vein, Williams observes that shame binds us together in a community of shared affect (see Williams 1993, pp. 80-1)<sup>33</sup>

With this specific understanding of shamefulness in place, we do not need to appeal to the idea of an internalised other, where this involves anything as robust as the theory of internal objects (as presented, for example, by Wollheim 1999). Lear illustrates this idea as follows:

a young Crow might internalize his joking-relative: he imagines this person when he is about to perform a questionable act. He now no

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<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Lear (2006, pp. 84-5).

<sup>33</sup> A similar point is made by Harcourt (2016, p. 105).

longer needs the prospect of actually being teased to regulate his behavior. And he does not inhibit himself because he might actually get caught. In a sense, he has already been caught — by his imagination... This self-regulation may be conscious: one may explicitly imagine what one's mother or father would think; or one may hear an internal voice that, on reflection, one associates with a parent; or one may dream of being under the gaze of another. But nothing so explicitly conscious need occur. The point is that one has acquired a capacity for self-regulation by monitoring one's actions in relation to an internal judge. Freud called this internalized other an *ego-ideal*. (Lear 2006, 85-6)

The Transactional Account is consistent with this theoretical framework though it does not require it. The availability of The Transactional Approach suggests that further argument is needed in support of the claim that a proper understanding of shame requires appeal to the psychoanalytic notion of an internalised other. Wollheim (1999) for example, thinks that in order to understand shame we must (i) draw upon the psychoanalytic theory of internal objects (see Segal 1973, ch. 2) and (ii) treat the relation we have to these internal objects in shame as explanatorily prior to our experience of shame before other people. His argument for these claims is that only an internalised other can have the relevant kind of authority over us and yet also capture the way in which shame involves a form of dependence on another. However, the position I have outlined here is able to provide a satisfactory explanation of shame and therefore has two advantages over Wollheim's. First, it retains the natural thought that shame when actually exposed to another is, in some sense, primary. Second, it does so without having to commit itself to the psychoanalytic account of internal objects. This is not to deny that the theory of internal objects cannot be useful in elucidating the nature of shame: but just that, for all we have seen, it is not required by such an account.<sup>34</sup>

#### 5.4. *Shame and ethical life.*

Once this transactional account of shame is seen to be available, the arguments that motivated The Normative Question are revealed to rest upon a non-mandatory conception of shame.

The account I have been defending understands shame as manifesting our concern with a specific sort of interpersonal connection with others. It therefore does not involve a superficial concern with the way we appear to others. Rather, it is concerned with the opinions of others only insofar as

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<sup>34</sup> Williams's (1993) appeal to the notion of an 'internalised other' arguably requires something like Wollheim's (1999) account of internal objects, though there are differences between their respective accounts of shame. The account offered here not only does not require reference to internal objects but it is able to accommodate the idea that shame does not involve an obviously problematic form of dependence of others, which I take it is Williams's main aim.

they determine or alter the evaluative stances others assume in relation to us and, thereby, the ways in which their attention is liable to act upon us.

It is true, on this view, that our susceptibility to shame involves a kind of dependence on others. In Chapter Three, I argued that human social life is characteristically a shared life with others, and this requires, to some extent, a shared ethical outlook with others, insofar as others are to share my sense of my own value. We are brought up by others and, in the course of our ethical education, we internalise the standards of our community, of what is admirable and what is shameful, this therefore comes to constitute our ethical identities and serves to bind us together with the rest of our community. As a result, shame does not manifest an uncritical incorporation of the opinions of others, but our own culturally inculcated appraisals as to what is shameful and what is not. This is a kind of dependence on others, but rather than constituting a problematic failure of autonomy, is a reflection of our nature as social animals that have a need for communion and interpersonal connection. Any form of autonomy to which we ought to aspire, therefore, will be compatible with this kind of dependence. Indeed there is little reason to think that freeing ourselves of our need for communion or our susceptibility to the approbative emotions is a genuine option for us. A life which lacked these things would neither be a recognisably human life, nor a genuine option for us.<sup>35</sup>

Some might be liable to object at this stage that the account offered here is problematic on normative grounds. A popular objection to The Self-Evaluation View is that it is committed to an unacceptable interpretation of cases in which one feels ashamed even where one rejects the associated adverse self-evaluation. Recall Bartky's students as described in §2.2. They believe their work is good and they would staunchly deny that they are academically incapable. However, having been regularly demeaned throughout their education, they have come to feel ashamed of their work and their ideas. Calhoun argues that The Self-Evaluation View is committed to saying that the shame of these students is irrational or defective insofar as it is committed either to saying that at some level these students do believe that their work is bad and that they are unintelligent, or to saying that though they do not believe this, they nevertheless hold this view, in some sense, at the level of feeling (as Bartky suggested). Calhoun summarises her complaint as follows:

Whatever the diagnosis, the conclusion is the same. No rational, mature person who firmly rejects her subordinate social status would feel shame in the face of sexist, racist, homophobic or classist expressions of contempt. The two views we have considered so far thus encourage us, at best, to seek out psychological explanations for

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<sup>35</sup> Examples of a life of this sort are much less common than is sometimes casually suggested. It clearly does not fit the life either of 'The Desert Fathers' or of Thoreau, as can be seen in even the most casual perusal of the relevant texts.



these irrational shame responses; and at worst, to chastise the subordinate for feeling ashamed and to exhort them to buck up, think for themselves, be more thick-skinned and spurn public opinion. That is, they encourage us to find fault with ashamed people. (Calhoun 2004, pp. 136-7)

The transactional account retains the idea that the person who feels ashamed feels themselves to be shameful, where this involves feeling the other's response to them to be merited by how they are. It is therefore vulnerable to this charge. However, I do not think this is a serious problem. Like Bartky, I am committed to the claim that these students, if they are properly described as feeling ashamed of their work though they judge that they have nothing to be ashamed of, are subject to a conflict between their feeling of shame and their judgement that they have nothing to be ashamed of. Calhoun is too quick to judge that if one suggests someone is subject to this kind of conflict then one thereby is suggesting that this person is being irrational (or else that this person is defective in some specific respect). All this really entails, however, is that I am committed to saying that these subjects undergo an experience of shame which is, by their lights, inappropriate. Just because one is subject to a feeling which is, by one's own lights, inappropriate does not entail that this inaptness is a product of some defect or distinctive irrationality on the subject's part. To suggest otherwise would fail to acknowledge the familiar idea that our emotional responses, along with our sense of the admirable and the shameful, the beautiful and the ugly, are determined over a long period of time, through habituation. This raises the possibility that, through critical reflection, our judgements about what is shameful can diverge from our feelings of shame and shamefulness. To suggest that any case in which such a misalignment arises is a defect, however, would only be true if we thought that our emotions ought to be immediately determined (and therefore in line with) our judgements. Such an assumption has little to be said in its favour, however. This is not how human emotions actually work. Anyone who has tried to re-habituate some of their ingrained tendencies, to cease to feel ashamed of things that they judge not to be shameful, is aware that this can be the labour of a lifetime. Moreover, there is good reason to think that this recalcitrance of our sense of the shameful to our judgements of shamefulness is a good thing. The fact our feelings of shamefulness are not immediately determined by our beliefs of what is shameful makes it possible for us to come to adopt new beliefs about what is shameful on the basis of feeling ashamed of something. In §2.2 I provided the example of feeling a sense of shame of one's work (which lives up to one's current standards), as the epistemic basis for a clearer recognition of what constitutes a good piece of work (e.g. in philosophy).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> A related point is made about shame by Williams (1993, pp. 99-100).

None of this is to deny that a feeling of shame that is inconsistent with one's judgements can sometimes constitute evidence of a defect in the subject. It might, for example, if we think that the reason for this conflict is the individual's fault. We might think this, for example, if they have not made the effort to re-habituate themselves, to challenge their ingrained sense of what is shameful, to try and bring it more closely into alignment with what they consider to actually be shameful, when there was at least the possibility of their succeeding in doing so. The important point, however, is that a conflict of this kind does not, in general, constitute evidence of a defect or of irrationality. Often enough this kind of conflict will be evidence of a virtue, a manifestation of the subject's rationality and autonomous, since this kind of conflict arises most often in those who spend time and effort reflecting on their thoughts, feelings and values.

Finally, there is something further to be said in defence of the idea that a feeling of shame, if it conflicts with an individual's beliefs about what is shameful, is inappropriate by that subject's own lights. Calhoun suggests that this attribution is uncharitable, whereas I have suggested that this would only be so if it entailed this subject was defective or specially irrational, which it does not. In fact, it is often the charitable interpretation. After all, it is likely to be the response these subjects will accept themselves. Someone might be ashamed of their accent or their body-type, even though at the level of reflection they realise they have nothing to be ashamed about. It is plausible that this individual will then judge that their shame *is* inappropriate. To say otherwise is both to imply that they ought to feel shame and to fail to make sense of their motivation to re-habituate themselves so as to no longer feel ashamed of themselves on these grounds. These points suggest that the account offered here is better placed to charitably interpret cases of this sort than that offered by Calhoun.

An example from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* can serve to substantiate this point. Ellison's narrator tells us: 'I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed' (Ellison 1953, p. 15). Calhoun would understand the narrator's past feeling shame of the fact that his grandparents were slaves as appropriate insofar as the belief that being the grandson of slaves is shameful, though not a belief of his (or, at least, no longer a belief of his), is a representative view of the moral practice in which he is a participant. But if she says this, then this will preclude the thought that his later higher-order shame of his past shame is appropriate? Assuming there has not been a radical change in the representative viewpoint of his social world but only a change in his dispositions, the answer seems to be 'no'. If his past shame is apt insofar as it reflects a representative standpoint on 'who he is' in that social world', then this gives us reason to think that having once been ashamed of being the grandchild of slaves will not be seen as shameful from the representative standpoint. Rather, it will be seen as appropriate, and, as a result, his later shame must come out as inappropriate on

Calhoun's account. The account I have been defending, however, acknowledges that his early shame was inappropriate (though it remains neutral, until more is said, about whether it is a sign of vice) and is thereby in a position to acknowledge the fact that his later shame is appropriate.

## §6. Conclusion

Of all of the self-conscious emotions, shame is the one which might seem most amenable to The Reductive Approach and least amenable to The Transactional Approach. In this chapter I hope to have shown this to be a mistake. The Reductive Approach is caught in an oscillation between two unsatisfying accounts of shame: The Self-Evaluation view which fails to describe shame insofar as it fails to make sense of the way in which shame is inherently concerned with our relations to others, and The Social Evaluation View, which is unable to make sense of the way shame involves the consciousness of oneself as being, as opposed to merely appearing, shameful. The Transactional Approach, on the other hand, provides a way out of this oscillation and is able to provide a more plausible account of the place of shame in the ethical lives of human beings in doing so.

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