

Moreover, for a long time both sympathetic and unsympathetic philosophical commentators on Marx understandably focused on Marx's problematic and changing relationship to Hegel, so that it was only later that the full importance of Marx's relationship to Aristotle began to be understood.<sup>17</sup> And the Marx from whom we need to learn is the Marx who had learned from Aristotle.

Had Marx achieved the university teaching appointment that he had hoped for at Bonn in 1842, his first lectures would have been on Aristotle. In the years 1843–1845, while a radical journalist, he made a close study of Aristotle's *Politics*. And when he refers to Aristotle in his mature economic writings, it is always with a kind of respect that he shows to few of his contemporaries. Indeed, he takes Aristotle to have described accurately the forms of economic exchange of the ancient Greek world and the history of their development. When he moves beyond Aristotle, in order to understand the distinctive economic forms and development of the modern world, he still employs key concepts as Aristotle used them: essence, potentiality, goal-directedness. For Marx, as for Aristotle, to have understood something, is to have grasped its essential properties, a prerequisite for identifying its causal relationships. For Marx, as for Aristotle, we understand something only if we know not only what it is, but what it has in it by its very nature to become. So he held, for example, that "Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape."<sup>18</sup> For Marx, as for Aristotle, human agents can be understood only as goal-directed, and we can distinguish between those goals the pursuit of which will develop their human potentiality and those goals the pursuit of which will frustrate their development. All these are parts of what Heinz Lubasz rightly called Marx's "decisive debt" to Aristotle, a debt that Marx acknowledged in the first chapter of *Capital*.

Marx is there asking how we should think about the value of the human labor embodied in a coat and of that embodied in a quantity of linen, so that the one becomes exchangeable for the other. Having identified certain features of that equivalence in value, he remarks that they "will become more intelligible if we go back to the great thinker who was the first to analyse so many forms, whether of thought, society, or Nature,

<sup>17</sup> On this see Scott Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, London: Duckworth, 1985; Jonathan E. Pike, *From Aristotle to Marx*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999; Heinz Lubasz "The Aristotelian Dimension in Marx," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, April 1, 1977; and Patricia Springborg, "Politics, Primordialism, and Orientalism: Marx, Aristotle, and the Myth of the Gemeinschaft," *American Political Science Review* 80, 1 (1986): 185–211.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, London: Allen Lane, 1973, p. 105.

and amongst them also the form of value, I mean Aristotle."<sup>19</sup> But Aristotle's analysis of the relationships between goods and money and of the concepts of use-value and exchange-value – Marx was referring to the discussion of just exchange in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – was, on Marx's view, necessarily incomplete, because Aristotle, living in a slave society, had not grasped the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labor, something possible only in a society in which "the concept of human equality" had been widely accepted. Marx therefore found it necessary to go beyond Aristotle in order to construct an account of value and especially of surplus value that would disclose the workings of a nineteenth-century economy.

Although Marx believed that from his own nineteenth-century standpoint the workings of a capitalist economy could now at last be understood, on his view those who had in the preceding centuries by their economic activities and relationships brought that economy into being not only had not understood but could not have understood those activities and relationships, activities and relationships whose character was disguised from them by the forms under which labor was presented, by the commodification of labor. "A commodity . . . is a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour."<sup>20</sup> Capitalism is not only a set of economic relationships. It is also a mode of presentation of those relationships that disguises and deceives.

One consequence of this inability to understand, as Marx noted later, was that neither capitalists nor productive workers were able to recognize that capital is "unpaid labor." The contrast with capitalist modernity that Marx draws is with the activities and relationships of the immediately preceding precapitalist economy, that of the European Middle Ages, that period, although Marx did not say so, in which the relevance of Aquinas's questioning had been evident. It was a state of affairs, declared Marx, where

we find everyone dependent, serfs and lords, vassals and suzerains, laymen and clergy. Personal dependence here characterizes the relations of production just as it does the other spheres of life organized on the basis of that production. But for the very reason that personal dependence forms

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, New York: International Publishers, 1967, pp. 59–60.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

the ground-work of society, there is no necessity for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality... Here the particular and natural form of labour... is the immediate social form of labour.<sup>21</sup>

Medieval people, in a setting very different from that of the capitalism that was about to develop, saw things as they were.

It is unsurprising that Marx, although himself so willing to learn from Aristotle, shows no awareness of any possible connection between this ability of people in the high Middle Ages to grasp the truth about their social condition and the fact that the theorists who educated their teachers and pastors were so often followers of Aristotle. For one thing those theorists were philosopher theologians and Marx had learned from his Enlightenment predecessors and from Feuerbach to be dismissive of theology. For another the scholarly historical study of the Middle Ages had only just begun. But what was thereby concealed from Marx's view was of some importance. What Aristotle's idiom, as employed by Aquinas and by many others, allowed his medieval readers – and those instructed by them – to do, as we have already noticed, was to pose political and moral questions about the particular social roles and relationships in which they found themselves and to construct a critique of those roles and relationships, questions that allowed them – craftsmen, farmers, merchants, judges, teachers, soldiers, and priests – to reflect critically upon those relationships of personal dependence of which Marx speaks. It therefore matters that the change in their way of life that resulted in an inability to understand their economic and social relationships was one that deprived them of that idiom and, with it, the possibility of asking those questions. What then is it that we can learn from Marx about that change? The Marx from whom we can learn is the Marx of the first volume of *Capital*, and what we need to learn is twofold.

On the one hand, his theory of surplus value is the key to understanding capitalism as an economic system, both capitalist accumulation and capitalist exploitation. On the other, his account of how individuals must think of themselves and of their social relationships, if they are to act as capitalism requires them to act, is the key to understanding why in capitalist societies individuals systematically misunderstand themselves and their social relationships. Capitalism, as Althusser emphasized, is a set of structures that function in and through modes of dissimulation. But to be undeceived we have to begin with surplus value.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

On Marx's account, for the concept of surplus value to have application certain preconditions must be satisfied. There must first of all be a labor force of workers no longer able to meet their needs and those of their families by farming the land where they live, either as tenants of their feudal lord, or as sharing in customary rights to common land, or as farmers of their own land, so that they have no alternative but to hire themselves out for wages, for money, in markets where they may have to and often will have to compete to be hired. There must also be a class of owners of the means of production – land, tools, machines, raw materials – who as employers pay out those wages, wages that are sufficient to sustain the needed labor force in being, but that are less than the value that those workers produce. That surplus value is appropriated by the employers for their own economic purposes. It is the source of their profits and then of the investments that they are able to make in their own and other enterprises. Without the appropriation of surplus value, the value of unrecompensed labor, such investment and, springing from it, the extraordinary rates of growth in productivity that capitalism generates would never have taken place.

Yet those whose labor power had thus become a commodity did not recognize themselves as, and even now generally do not recognize themselves as having become in this respect commodities to be exchanged for money, to be bought and sold at whatever rate the relevant market dictates. They thought and think of themselves in quite other ways and understandably so. "Commodities are things and therefore without power of resistance against man... in order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves into relation with one another, as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and part with his own, except by means of an act done by mutual consent. They must, therefore, mutually recognize in each other the rights of private proprietors," something that finds expression in the form of a contract.<sup>22</sup> The relations of exchange through which those who own the means of production appropriate the unpaid labor of productive workers are disguised by their legal form as the contractual relations of free individuals, each of them seeking what she or he takes to be best for her or himself. And as capitalism becomes the dominant economic mode of production and exchange, so this way of thinking about oneself and one's relationships becomes the dominant mode of social and moral thought, both among theorists and in everyday life.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

What distinguishes one mode of social and moral thought from another is the set of questions to which its precepts and arguments provide answers. So the questions to which this new, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth century rapidly maturing mode of thought had to provide answers focused on the norms needed to govern the relationship of each individual to other individuals, the norms that each individual should recognize as binding on her or himself. That is to say, the question for each individual became 'Why should I not pursue the satisfaction of my desires with unbridled egoism, resorting to force or to fraud whenever necessary?' and the case for morality became the case for altruism. Disputes among philosophical theorists become disputes as to what that case is. Hobbes gave one answer, Locke another, Hume a third, Smith a fourth, Bentham a fifth, Kant a sixth, Hegel a seventh. Their rival answers mirrored and continue to mirror the disputes of everyday life. Their originality lay in the arguments by which they supported those answers, arguments that to a remarkable extent became part of the argumentative repertoire of everyday life. So there came into being both the phenomenon that I identified in the final section of Chapter 1 of this essay as Morality (Bernard Williams' "the morality system") and its counterpart, modern moral philosophy.

It is important that what distinguishes the standpoint of Morality from that of any NeoAristotelian standpoint and most notably from that of Aquinas are the central questions that those who occupy that standpoint ask and the concepts whose unproblematic character they presuppose in asking those questions. It is important that there is no place within their conceptual scheme for such Aristotelian and Thomistic notions as those of an end, a common good, or the natural law. Their conception of happiness as a psychological state, that state in which an individual's desires have been satisfied, is very different from the Aristotelian conception of *eudaimonia* or the Thomistic conception of *beatitudo*. The result by the early eighteenth century was that when such protagonists of Aquinas as there still were put to their European contemporaries questions that Aquinas had addressed to his contemporaries, they went unheard. The presuppositions of the way of life and the mode of thought that had come into being were just too different. It was not that those whose lives were informed by a Thomist understanding of themselves and their relationships could not on occasion put the moral culture of capitalist economies to the question, but that they could do so effectively only when they presented not just an alternative body of theory, but the possibility of an alternative way of life to the capitalist way of life, that is, when they presented the NeoAristotelian

tradition in its Thomistic form as an alternative set of practices informed by an alternative understanding of the relationship of theory to practice. And this was rarely so.

When – very occasionally and in exceptional conditions – it was so, it was instructive. In the sixteenth century it was Dominicans who had had a Thomistic education who argued against Renaissance Aristotelians, such as Sepúlveda, that Aristotle's texts could not be used to justify the enslavement of indigenous peoples in the Americas. In the seventeenth century it was Thomistically educated Jesuits who organized the Tupi-Guarani people and others to resist enslavement by military force and led them both in battle and on a migration at the end of which they established communities organized on the basis of a strong conception of the common good. The Indians in those communities were educated to read and write, as soldiers, farmers, craftsmen, and musicians. Their productive work was directed toward increasing and egalitarian prosperity for the entire community and the original 12,000 had grown to nearly 100,000 in the early eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The Jesuit leaders of this first modern communist society, however, not only provided, but also monopolized leadership, and as a result failed to provide for a future leadership that would have enabled that society to survive the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portuguese and Spanish territories in 1759 and 1767. So Aquinas became as irrelevant in the uplands of the Parana River as he already was almost everywhere else in the century of Smith and Bentham.

Aquinas as a NeoAristotelian theorist therefore played a very different part on the one hand as a questioner of the cultural and social order of his own time and place and on the other as someone invoked centuries later by critical questioners of the cultural and social order of an increasingly well established capitalist economy. I have argued that our ability to understand the nature of that difference adequately depends in part on our having learned from Marx just what it was about capitalism – the appropriation of surplus value – that transformed the relationships of the cultural and social order so radically and what it was that disguised the nature of those relationships. It also depends on our having learned from Marx key truths about the destructive and self-destructive aspects of capitalism. Capitalist investment combined with technological invention to produce industrial revolution after industrial revolution, developing productive capacities and

<sup>23</sup> See D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 172–178.

powers and raising standards of living as it did so. But it also, as Marx had observed and predicted, destroyed or marginalized traditional ways of life, created gross and sometimes grotesque inequalities of income and wealth, lurched through crisis after crisis, creating recurrent mass unemployment, and left those areas and those communities that it was not profitable to develop permanently impoverished and deprived.

It had been Marx's hope and belief that, as the industrial working class responded to their condition under capitalism by acts and institutions of resistance to what was inflicted on them, they would increasingly understand themselves and their conditions in the terms that he and Engels had provided and to some extent they did so, especially in Germany and France. Yet what Marx had not predicted was the kind of debate and the extent of debate that was to take place among working-class and other critics of capitalism. He had of course from an early stage been aware of and dismissive of the Utopian socialists and the first Christian socialists, while later he and Engels had struggled to minimize Ferdinand LaSalle's influence on the German Social Democratic Party. But there were some kinds of conflict that he had not foreseen.

These conflicts were rooted both in the changing conditions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century working-class life and in the need to interpret and find new applications for the teaching of Marx and Engels in those conditions. What they elicited were a set of rival Marxisms that gave expression to a range of reformist and revolutionary interpretations of Marx. The disagreements of the protagonists of these rival interpretations were various but presupposed agreement on two major issues. The working class, so it was argued, could only achieve its economic and social goals through giving its support to a Marxist political party that would provide it with leadership and direction. And the task of that party, so it was argued, was to win control of the agencies of the state and to use the power of the state to transfer the ownership of the means of production from the members of the capitalist class to the now socialist state. It would then become possible to construct a socialist society under the leadership of party and state. But those propositions were themselves of course subject matter for debate.

It mattered immensely that in Marx's later life there had already developed and was developing further a lively working-class culture in countries such as Germany, France, and England, a culture of reading and writing, of sports and games, of trade unions, mutual aid societies, and other clubs, of beer halls and bars and eating places, of music halls and circuses, of, on occasion, churches. Working-class people thought for themselves

about what capitalism inflicted on them and, if their thoughts were to be Marxist thoughts, that would depend on the ability of Marxists to engage them in debate and on how that debate went. Here Marxists made notable advances within trade unions and political parties, but also encountered rival claimants for working-class allegiance. And it was not unimportant that increasingly Marxists also had to engage in quite another sort of theoretical debate, academic debate, in which their antagonists were those defenders of capitalism whose theses and arguments derived from the first emerging and then established discipline of economics. For that academic discipline presented capitalism from a perspective in which Marx's critique becomes invisible. Just because it does so, it poses the question of whether its presentation of capitalism is not one more mode of presentation well designed, although not of course intentionally, to disguise and deceive.

### 2.5 Academic economics as a mode of understanding and misunderstanding

Economics took on the form of an academic discipline in a number of European universities in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Its content was principally supplied by the work of equilibrium theorists in Austria, France, England, and elsewhere. The central claim advanced by those theorists and by their successors was and is that it is only through unregulated competition within free markets that scarce resources are allocated efficiently, so that prices express a matching of supply with demand and there is a movement toward a state of equilibrium in which each participant in market transactions fares as well as she or he can under conditions that are optimal for every other participant. What those theorists claimed to have achieved, and to some degree had achieved, was a representation by means of a set of equations of those relationships of exchange that determine relative prices within particular markets and so provide investors, entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers with the data that they need to make their economic decisions, if they are to act as rational maximizers. The further development of economic theory was in part the result of more or less successful attempts to accommodate within their generalizations apparent or real anomalies and to do justice to the increasing complexities of economic activity. That latter goal was achieved only by a growing sophistication in mathematics.

The history of economics in the last 150 years could be illuminatingly written as a history of its textbooks, partly because from Marshall to

*Morality and modernity***3.1 Morality, the morality of modernity**

Expressivism is, as we noted at the outset, a metaethical theory, a second order theory about the meaning and use of evaluative and normative expressions. From a NeoAristotelian point of view, the key error of expressivists is not the claim that evaluative and normative judgments must be such as to be able to motivate, that they must be expressive of desires and passions. It is in how they draw the line between, on the one hand, the factual and, on the other, the evaluative and the normative so that it becomes for them an a priori truth that no judgment can be both factual and evaluative. In consequence, in their discussions of evaluation all those empirically grounded judgments about what it is for animals of a given species, including human animals, to flourish or to fail to flourish, judgments about how it is best for this individual or this group to act in these circumstances and about the norms to which she, he, or they must conform, if it is to go well for them, judgments that observation confirms as true or false, disappear from view. In philosophy it is never enough to identify such a mistake as a mistake. It is also necessary to explain how highly intelligent and perceptive thinkers could have come to make such a mistake. As we should have learned from Marx and Nietzsche, we need a sociology and a psychology of philosophical error. How, then, should we NeoAristotelians characterize what we take to be this mistake made by expressivists? It was and is, I shall suggest, the mistake of supposing that what held and holds true of the evaluative and normative judgments of one particular morality, embedded in one particular social and cultural order, the order that they themselves inhabit, holds true of any and every evaluative and normative judgment in all times and all places. Which particular morality was it and is it by which the expressivists were misled? It was and is the morality to which I have given the name 'Morality' (Chapter 1, section 1.10), the moral system peculiar to and characteristic of early and

late capitalist modernity. Morality, which has flourished and still flourishes in Western and Central Europe, in North America, and in other parts of the earth that their inhabitants have colonized from the early eighteenth to the twenty-first century, had and has six salient characteristics, some of which we have already noticed.

First, it is presented by its adherents as a secular doctrine and mode of practice, permitting no appeal beyond itself to real or purported divine commandments. Instead it provides standards by which the doctrines and actions of religious believers and unbelievers alike are to be evaluated. Secondly, it is held to be universally binding on all human agents, whatever the culture or social order to which they belong, and its precepts are therefore somehow or other knowable by all. Those precepts must therefore be translatable into any human language of any time or place. Thirdly, those precepts function as a set of constraints upon each individual, setting limits to the ways in which and the extent to which each may act so as to satisfy her or his desires and pursue her or his interests, and requiring her or him to take account of the needs of others. It is noteworthy that in the period in which Morality becomes the dominant morality the concepts of egoism and altruism move to a more central place in the discussions of moral philosophers and that later on, when twentieth-century biologists who identify morality with Morality try to explain the emergence of morality in evolutionary terms, they identify the problem of explaining the emergence of morality with that of explaining the emergence of altruism. It is a presupposition of the practitioners of Morality that to act for the good of others as Morality enjoins will often be to act contrary to one's own interests and desires.

Fourthly, the precepts of Morality are framed in highly abstract and general terms. They are presented as binding on individuals as such. They make no mention of occupational role or social status. Individuals too are characterized in highly general and abstract terms. Each individual is taken to aim at achieving her or his happiness by satisfying her or his desires. Each individual is presented as having or as able to acquire one and the same understanding of the key terms of Morality: 'right action', 'duty', 'utility', 'a right'. Each individual has the capacity for acting as an autonomous agent and is required so to act. It is in virtue of their possession of this capacity that individuals deserve respect. Fifthly, although the adherents of Morality include both conservative and liberal critics of whatever happen to be its present formulations, the background to their debates is a shared belief that Morality thus conceived is superior to all other moralities, the latest and highest stage in the moral history of humankind.

Sixthly and finally, Morality is such that agents from time to time cannot avoid confronting a set of problems of a highly specific character. What are they? There are, so the exponents of Morality teach, certain principles or rules that ought always or almost always to be obeyed. We ought never – or almost never – to bring about the death of an innocent other intentionally. We ought never – or almost never – to connive at the conviction of an innocent person for a crime that he did not commit. We ought never – or almost never – to inflict torture. But we ought also, according to the exponents of Morality, to act so as to maintain and increase, perhaps to maximize, the well-being of others, including those others who constitute our local or national community. Consider, then, those cases where we can only act with due regard for the well-being of some set of relevant others by violating one of those principles or rules that we ought to obey, where we can only obey one or more of those principles and rules by cooperating in causing grave harms to innocent others. Technicolor examples of such dilemmas are by now stock cases in many moral philosophy classes. Consider two such.

A terrorist knows where a bomb due to explode within twenty-four hours is concealed. We know that if it explodes, numerous innocent people will be killed or maimed. Our only means for discovering and so becoming able to disarm the bomb is to torture the terrorist. Or I am the only person in a position to prevent an out-of-control vehicle from crashing so that a large number of passengers will be killed. But my only means of doing this are such that, by acting so as to prevent the crash, I will intentionally bring about the death of an innocent bystander. In both cases we are in situations where there is obvious application for the principle that enjoins us to do everything that we can to save innocent human lives. Yet in both cases, if we act as that principle enjoins, we will violate another principle that is often treated as inviolable. Such are the dilemmas of Morality. If it is protested that these are examples of rare and highly exceptional types of case, the reply will be that much less melodramatic dilemmas of the same type recur in everyday life, as when we decide to violate the principle forbidding lying, because of the pain to numbers of people that will be caused by telling the truth in this particular case, or we commit an injustice to a small group who are unlikely to complain in order to benefit a large and vociferous group who will make an intolerable nuisance of themselves if they do not get what they want, or we justify some infringement of the property rights of homeowners in the name of economic development.

Morality, as understood and embodied in everyday practice, provides no generally acceptable solutions to such dilemmas. Those moral philosophers

who identify morality with Morality not only exhibit imagination and ingenuity in constructing examples of them, but also often provide what they claim to be solutions to them, each on the basis of that theory in terms of which she or he purports to provide a rational justification for the claims of Morality. The problem is that there are just too many such theories, each of them incompatible with the others. So in the arenas of theoretical debate, there are Kantian, utilitarian, and contractarian exponents of Morality and of each such view there are several versions. What appears to be unattainable at the level of theory is agreement both on how these types of dilemma are to be resolved and, more generally, on how particular moral claims are to be justified. At the level of practice, there is not only disagreement, but inconsistency and oscillation. Individuals, corporations, and governments will on one occasion argue for the inviolability of this or that rule or set of rights, on another for setting them aside in order to achieve what is presented as a greater good. There is one standard rhetoric that is well designed to be persuasive in arguing in favor of inviolability and another equally well designed to be persuasive in arguing against it, and contemporary moral philosophy is a storehouse of relevant arguments for both side in each debate.

To the vast majority of those who have from early childhood been educated into the cultures of modernity, this condition is so familiar as to be unremarkable. Even if they have learned at some time that there are and have been other very different moralities, from whose perspective the line between the morally unproblematic and the morally problematic is drawn in quite other ways, this thought has no effect on their own practical commitments, and they remain unaware of what it is that is distinctive in the stances of Morality. What differentiates their practical beliefs and attitudes from those of, say, seventeenth-century Japanese Confucians or nineteenth-century Navaho may be matter for historians or anthropologists but has no practical relevance for them. Yet Morality *is* very different from some other moralities, and one way to bring out what is distinctive about it is to compare its salient features with those of an Aristotelian moral stance, as we have already characterized it. Three contrasts will at once come to mind.

First, for an Aristotelian the point and purpose of conformity to moral precepts is that failure so to conform will hinder or prevent us from achieving our goods qua human beings. By contrast, for the exponents of Morality whether there are such goods and what they are are open questions. The constraints of morality make it possible for each of us to pursue the objects of our desires, no matter how conceived, provided

only that we permit others the same freedom that we enjoy. Agreement that there is a human good, let alone agreement on what it is, is not presupposed. Secondly, for an Aristotelian, individuals can achieve their own individual goods *only* in and through achieving those common goods that they share with others, qua family member, qua colleague in the workplace, qua fellow citizen, qua friend, so that care of one's family, of the ethos of one's workplace, of the justice of one's political society and of one's friends are characteristically and generally marks of a good human life. For the exponents of Morality, its requirements are sufficiently abstract and general to govern the relationships of any individual to any other individual whatsoever, and those universal requirements are framed so as to be independent of the particularities of this or that agent's relationships and circumstances. Unsurprisingly, practical intelligence – Aristotle's *phronēsis*, Aquinas's *prudentia* – the capacity to judge and act with an eye to such particularities, is on an Aristotelian view *the* key moral and intellectual virtue, while it plays no part in any of the major expositions of Morality.

Thirdly, for the exponents of Morality, as for its practitioners, 'the moral' is to be distinguished from 'the political', 'the legal', 'the aesthetic', 'the social', and 'the economic'. Each of these in the world view of modernity names a distinct aspect of human activity and, as academic disciplines emerge, each of those aspects provides a distinct discipline with its own peculiar subject matter, one that can be studied for the most part without much or any reference to the others. From an Aristotelian standpoint, by contrast, each of these aspects of activity can be adequately understood only in relation to the others, as in this or that way and in these or those circumstances it contributes to or frustrates the achievement of goods rightly ordered and so of the ultimate human good. Aristotle took ethics as an area of enquiry to be part of and subordinate to politics – understood significantly differently from modern politics – and the political life itself to be an incomplete life, since the achievement of the ultimate human good lies beyond politics. On a contemporary NeoAristotelian view, economics, sociology, and the study of law each need to be understood within a framework provided by the enquiries of politics-and-ethics so that we ask of each type of economic activity and social relationship what it contributes to sustaining or undermining those kinds of institutional, organizational, and social structures through which common and individual goods are achieved.

What this third and last contrast brings out is that the distinctive character of Morality is not only a matter of the form and content of its precepts, but also of the place that it occupies in both the everyday and the academic

thought and practice of those whose lives are informed by it, relative to other aspects of their lives. An important question to ask in this respect is whence then it is that the precepts of Morality are taken to derive their peculiar authority for those for whom those precepts have authority. Laws, understood in the modern world as the positive laws of sovereign states, derive their authority from the authority and coercive power of such states. The contentions of economists, like those of other natural and social scientists, are treated as authoritative just insofar as those who advance them are able to cite compelling theoretical arguments and empirical support. But to what do the adherents of Morality appeal, if someone enquires why they should respect its precepts?

They give, as we noticed earlier, a number of different and rival answers, each of them an appeal to some standard independent of their own – or anyone else's – attitudes and feelings and each of them contested by those who advance rival answers. Because they share a conception of Morality as requiring an appeal to just such a standard, they generally understand expressivism of any kind as a threat to their convictions. But, because they are recurrently involved in ongoing disagreements and conflicts during which argument and reason giving fail to convince their rivals, so that each contending party has to fall back on assertion and counter assertion – often increasingly shrill and dogmatic assertion and counter assertion – they are apt to give the appearance of those who are doing no more than voicing prerational attitudes and commitments. They appear to be just what the emotivists said that they were.

There are, however, many moralities that lack this distinctive feature of Morality, and the attempt by both emotivists and their expressivist heirs to present their account as one that holds of evaluative and normative judgments as such, in addition to the other challenges that it has to meet, fails to take account of the idiosyncratic character of Morality. What, then, made such a morality as Morality possible? How could this particular set of judgments and ideals be presented as having, be accepted as having, authority in virtue of a standard independent of the attitudes, feelings, and concerns of those who acknowledge that authority without ever having been able to give a rationally justifiable account of what that standard is? How could a morality whose most acute theorists, utilitarian, Kantian, and contractarian, remain in permanent disagreement retain its hegemony over so many for so long? We can best approach answers to these questions by considering Morality not in isolation from other aspects of that larger culture, the culture of enlightened modernity, of which it is a part, but in its relationships to several other major aspects of

that culture. Consider those desires, hopes, and fears that are distinctively modern.

### 3.2 The modernity in which Morality is at home

What desires agents have, how those desires are felt and expressed, and how they are related to the practical reasoning of agents vary both within and between social and cultural orders. Biological needs may be constant, but the desires that are satisfied in satisfying them can be for very different objects. Those in nineteenth-century Edo who appeased their hunger by satisfying their appetite for sashimi and those in nineteenth-century Bologna who did so by satisfying their appetite for *salsa Bolognese*, let alone those present-day eclectic Londoners who have a taste for both, had had and have had their initial desires for food educated in very different ways. Other needs and wants are similarly transformed, and in different social and cultural orders the means of satisfying them are integrated into different ways of life in which familial and occupational roles and the goals, ambitions, and hopes that attach to those roles assume distinctive forms. We noted earlier that our desires are always closely related to our affections, habits, and beliefs and that these too take different forms in different ways of life. If then we are concerned to understand what we have good reason to desire, it is of some importance to ask what parts desires play in those ways of life characteristic of the social and cultural order that we inhabit, the social and cultural order of modernity, even though in so doing we shall mostly be reminding ourselves of what is obvious. Consider some peculiarly modern forms of opportunity and hope, insecurity and poverty, regret and lament, and ambition, all of them arising from the recurrent transformations of work as economic modernity developed from the eighteenth century onwards.

Begin with opportunities and hopes. The social and cultural order of modernity in all its various forms is what it is only because of long-term – it has often seemed indefinitely long term – economic growth and technological innovation, growth sometimes slow, sometimes fast, sometimes continuous, sometimes disrupted, sometimes deliberately shaped, more generally unplanned. That growth recurrently involves the provision of new kinds of work, often enough with slowly increasing wages for workers, sometimes with new opportunities for managerial and professional careers, sometimes with extraordinary rewards for those able to set others to work and to appropriate the surplus value of their labor. And it results in new institutions and the remaking of older institutions, most notably perhaps

of the schools that prepare children and adolescents for the labor force. As part of these changes, there emerge new types of inequality, new forms of class differentiation, new conflicts and struggles, and new objects of desire and aspiration. Consider just three examples of types of aspiring agent, first, nineteenth- and twentieth-century workers in more or less regular employment in mills and factories, who as workers realistically aspired to better the lot of themselves and their families, while remaining working class, secondly, those individuals of the same period who, whatever their social origin, were able to acquire the skills and had the imagination and the luck needed to make their way upwards through the class system toward whatever was accounted locally as social and economic success, and finally those contemporaries of unrestrained financial ambition with the initial resources to serve that ambition, for whom nothing was – and is – ever enough.

The stories of the first are characteristically stories of discoveries of the need to take collective action, stories of working-class individuals and families that became strands in the history of the trade union movement and of its politics. The stories of the second provide matter both for novelists and for those sociologists who map the changing structures of bourgeois careers through the various levels of management, or from, say, apprentice engineer or lawyer or accountant to mastery in such professions. The stories of the third are sometimes fables of the very rich, but also often case histories of an addiction, an addiction to money. But none of these stories would have the structure that they have were it not for the fact that they are stories of individuals, families, and groups moved not only by aspirations and hopes, but also by fears of frustration and failure, fears of long-term unemployment and poverty, fears of being unable to move beyond mind- and spirit-deadening forms of work, fears of the burden of debt.

It is within lives informed by these larger hopes and fears that individuals develop those likings and dislikings, those bonds and antagonisms, that take form in the multiplicity of their particular desires, tastes, affections, and habits to eat this rather than that, to spend time with these persons rather than those, in this way rather than that, to be here rather than there. And if we were to recount in adequate detail not just the three kinds of life that I have mentioned, but all those other types of life that are structured by the distinctive hopes and fears of capitalist and technological modernity, what we would have described is the range of contexts within which agents at each stage of their lives make their choices and in so doing order the various objects of their desires, treating the achievement of some



only as means to the achievement of others, giving high priority to the achievement of some and low priority to others, perhaps reconsidering with pain or pleasure some of their past choices. What intellectual, moral, and social resources do such agents have, if in moments of reflection they ask how it would be best for them to order their desires and so their lives?

It turns out that too often they lack some badly needed resources, and this in part because of the modes of thought characteristic of agents in their types of situation and in part because of the nature of those situations. Begin with the latter. What those situations have in common is the degree to which they are shaped by the flow of money, initially the movements of capital, movements that may be either creative and productive or destructive or both at once. They are most obviously creative and productive when they enable the development and application of new technologies and with them new forms of work, whether in iron smelting in eighteenth-century England or in the industrial applications of chemistry in nineteenth-century Germany or in the information technologies of the twentieth-century United States. They are most obviously destructive when their effect is such that those engaged in a well-established mode of production can no longer find a market for what they produce, so that they are, often suddenly and unexpectedly, out of work, deprived of their livelihood and sometimes of their whole way of life. But, whatever their situation, what is crucial for individuals and their families in respect of their desires is the relationship between the wages and salaries that they earn and the prices of the goods and services for which they pay. They have to ask not only 'What do I or we want?' and 'What have I or we good reason to want?' but also 'What can I or we afford?'

In answering this latter question, they are constantly invited to value this or that object of desire as the market values it, as the market responds to demand. But demand is for the satisfaction of whatever may happen to be the desires and the self-identified needs of those who at this or that particular time or place happen to have enough money in their pockets, whether or not those needs are genuine needs, whether or not those desires are desires that agents have good reason to attempt to satisfy. A growing economy requires of those who do productive work that they also function as consumers and, so far as they can, those who provide goods and services to such consumers shape their tastes so that they will desire and even take themselves to need whatever it is that that economy requires them to consume. It is such producers and consumers who most need to be able to distinguish between what is or could be of genuine value for their lives and their flourishing and what the market invites them to value. But market

societies make it difficult for working- and middle-class people to engage in the kind of shared reflection and deliberation which are necessary if they are so to distinguish in their everyday decision making. How so?

We get a first clue as to how to answer this question if we examine the long and tangled history of those conflicts in which resistance has been mounted to what have been presented either as means to economic growth or as necessities of the market, from the older defenses of traditional rights in the face of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century enclosures of common lands to the Luddite struggles of the handloom weavers to preserve their way of life, to militant trade union actions for the sake of decent wages and working conditions, and to the actions of urban community organizers and organizations in twentieth-century cities, such as Chicago and Boston. Among the many things that should impress us in that history is how much easier those engaged in such conflicts have found it to say clearly and articulately what they were *against* rather than what they were *for*, how incisive and to the point their various identifications of injustice have been, but how unclear the implications of those identifications for any adequate overall conception of justice. So in the face of the constructive and destructive transformations of modernity, those plain persons engaged in such conflicts have rarely been able to think through and to spell out for themselves an adequate alternative conception of the directions that social and economic change should take, one that might have enabled them to evaluate more adequately the claims that have been made for their allegiance by political movements of various kinds from the eighteenth century onwards.

The problem has been that the characteristic habits of thought of modernity are such that they make it extremely difficult to think about modernity except in its own terms, terms that exclude application for those concepts most needed for radical critique. We therefore need an account of those distinctively modern modes of institutionalized activity and of the habits of thought integral to those modes of activity that will enable us to answer two different sets of questions, one concerning the particular formations and deformations of desires that emerge in the contexts of modernity and one concerning the ways of thinking about our activities and our lives that are at once alien to modernity and indispensable for understanding it. But before I try to provide just such an account, a word of caution, especially to readers antagonized by what is negative in my view of modernity, is in place.

The history of modernity, insofar as it has been a series of social and political liberations and emancipations from arbitrary and oppressive rule, is indeed in key respects a history of genuine and admirable progress.

The history of modernity, insofar as it has been a history of artistic and scientific achievement, from Raphael to Rothko or from Palestrina to Schoenberg, and from Copernicus and Galileo to Feynman and Higgs, is indeed a history of equally genuine and admirable achievement. And nothing that I have said here or elsewhere implies otherwise. Yet it is this same modernity in which new forms of oppressive inequality, new types of material and intellectual impoverishment, and new frustrations and misdirections of desire have been recurrently generated. There are a number of very different stories to be told about modernity, all of them true. But all of these presuppose a distinctive political and economic framework.

### 3.3 State and market: the ethics-of-the-state and the ethics-of-the-market

The story of modern politics has at its core a narrative of the making and sustaining of the modern state, while the story of modern economies is that of the making and sustaining of modern markets, yet those stories partly fuse in the twentieth century with the emergence of a new, if often sickly, Leviathan, the state-and-the-market. The first European Leviathans, the nation states, were distinguished from the medieval forms of government that preceded them by the successful claim in each case of a single centralized secular authority to a monopoly in the use of armed force to impose order within its territory, to defend its frontiers, and to exact military service from its subjects, and in the power to issue currency and to tax its subjects. It is the state that defines and makes law and its law making powers are such that the exercise of its authority can be indefinitely extended, from the establishment or disestablishment of religion to the regulation of trade, from the founding of central banks to the inauguration of postal services, and beyond these to a wide range of educational and welfare measures. Against the verdicts of the highest legal tribunals of the state, there is generally no appeal.

As the governments of modern nation states expand the exercise of their powers, they become complex institutions, sets of agencies operating in significantly different ways, so that those ministries that direct the armed forces have one set of tasks, those that deal with financial affairs another, those that administer justice a third, those that handle welfare or educational affairs a fourth, and so on. Government is both centralized and heterogeneous, invoking a single authority, yet always liable to generate internal conflict. What is needed to unify such governments, if they are to

be effective, is twofold: the enforcement of a bureaucratized, hierarchical order within and between the agencies of government and the inculcation of a code of conduct in those who direct and those who serve those agencies, the ethics-of-government. That code has to prescribe the conscientious performance of the duties of each particular role and to prohibit favoritism and corruption. Impersonality is the mark of the good bureaucrat who serves the state. It should make no difference to which Inspector of Taxes or Public Prosecutor you are referred. But now note the difference between what the ethics-of-the-state requires of such public servants and what it requires of their masters, of those who govern.

Their assigned task is to promote the good and the goods of the state, as they understand them. Those goods are public goods, goods enjoyed by individuals which characteristically serve the purposes of individuals, but that those individuals could not achieve except through some form of political organization. Such goods include the provision of roads and other means of travel and communication and the maintenance of systems of public education, but paramount among them are the goods of law and order, of a stable currency, and of national security. To achieve those goods, they must be prepared to use whatever means are necessary, while making it appear that they only use such means as are generally thought morally acceptable. This requirement is often best served by those who except on rare occasions do only use such means, but on those rare occasions show themselves adept in the arts of successful lying and of concealing their responsibility for, for example, acts of brutality, justifying what they do to themselves and their associates by appealing to what they take to be the consequences of acting otherwise. The ethics-of-the-state may seem to be potentially incoherent. For if its maxims were fully spelled out, some would seem to presuppose a consequentialist standpoint, others something more like a 'my station and its duties' point of view. However, we need to remember that its maxims have application not to individual agents as such, but to individual agents only qua occupants of well-defined roles, answerable to others whose roles confer authority. Such agents encounter those maxims as requirements in their everyday transactions and commonly few or no questions of consistency arise.

As modern states developed their extraordinary powers, it became clear to both rulers and ruled that those powers, coercive and otherwise, can only be successfully exercised in the long run if the authority of the state is recognized as legitimate by the vast majority of the ruled. So a central issue of political theory posed hard questions for political practice, and the eighteenth-century American and French revolutions became permanent

she is expressing a prerational attitude or set of feelings that moves her to judge and act as she does. What she then concludes, just like her imagined predecessor in our earlier discussion, is that, *if* expressivism is true, then her conflict must be redescribed as an internal conflict between two incompatible sets of feelings and desires. But, if that is what it is, what she now has to do is to identify reasons for judging between the rival claims of those incompatible sets of feelings and desires. She needs to identify some rationally justifiable standard independent of these and any other feelings and desires which will enable her to make a rational choice. It is at this point that, whether she recognizes it or not, NeoAristotelian claims become relevant and expressivism has to fall silent. But she still has to ask what she has learned from expressivism and what light an expressivist critique might throw on Morality.

What she should have learned from expressivism is that our evaluative and normative judgments must be such that they can motivate us to act in accordance with them and that they can only so motivate us insofar as they afford expression to our sentiments, to our feelings and attitudes. About this Hume and those expressivists who have followed him have plainly been right. Everyone who advances an account of evaluative and normative judgments has left their account incomplete until they have provided an explanation in acceptable psychological terms of how and why judgments, construed in their terms, motivate. From a NeoAristotelian standpoint, however, expressivists have failed to supply an adequate account of the range of possible motivations. They have been unable to recognize that such judgments may give expression to the attitudes and feelings of morally educated agents just because they direct such agents toward and to the achievement of what they have learned to understand as their goods and good. Such judgments, asserted by such agents, are asserted as true – and not only in some weakened quasirealist construal of ‘true’ – and motivate as they do only because they are taken to be truths concerning matters of fact. So our imagined agent should recognize it as the truth in expressivism that our evaluative and normative judgments have a motivating power derived at least in part from the feelings and attitudes to which they give expression. What else might she have learned from expressivism? That it provides a more adequate account of Morality than the adherents of Morality themselves provide.

Consider once again the high incidence of unresolved and apparently unresolvable disagreements in judgment among the adherents of Morality and about the ways in which those disagreements are expressed. What expressivism tells us about those disagreements – and about Morality it is

convincing – is that each contending party’s Moral judgments give expression to underlying prerational commitments, to attitudes and sentiments that find expression in the unargued premises of their arguments. What our own observations of the utterances of agents advancing this or that claim in situations of Moral disagreement add is not only that such agents do not recognize this fact about themselves, but also that it seems that it is only because they do not recognize it that they are able to continue as they do. What appears to sustain them in their assertive Moral stances is their mistaken conviction that the injunctions to which they defer have an authority that is independent of their recognition of it, that is independent of their attitudes, sentiments, and choices. Were they to believe otherwise, so it seems, they would have to acknowledge that they have been deceived and self-deceived about the claims of Morality.

Suppose now that our imagined agent, in the course of reflecting on her dilemma, is impressed by this line of argument. She concludes that her own dilemma does indeed arise from an inner conflict between rival sets of attitudes and feelings, a conflict which she must now resolve. But how to resolve it? She needs, we recall, a standard and a standpoint independent of her own present feelings and attitudes, and she may not yet be open to considering NeoAristotelian claims. She finds no help in Frankfurt, since her problem is of the form: What should I care about most? With which of my feelings and desires should I identify? What expressivism has taught her is to be suspicious of Morality. So it would make sense for her to turn for resources to some of its most notable critics in order to consider what they can offer by way of such a standard and such a standpoint. Those include Oscar Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, and Bernard Williams, and from each of these both she and we have something to learn.

### 3.8 *Morality put in question by Oscar Wilde*

It is a commonplace in some twentieth-century writing that an artist who is deeply committed to her or his art may in following through on that commitment have to violate the requirements not just of Morality, but of morality more broadly conceived. The example most often cited is that of the Post-Impressionist painter, Paul Gauguin, about whom the story is repeatedly told that he deserted his wife and children in France in order to pursue the relentless demands of his art in Tahiti. The story serves admirably as an example. Unfortunately it is false. Gauguin for quite a number of years lived with his Danish wife and their children in Copenhagen, working as a tarpaulin salesman in order to support them, but ineffectively. It was

only when his wife and her family had asked him to leave that he returned to France, and only some years after that that he left France for French Polynesia. The story as so often told is a fable. That it has so often been retold by philosophers – including me – is all the more regrettable because the same point could have been made by telling a true story, that of Oscar Wilde.

Wilde was not a supremely great artist, as Gauguin was, yet he was a not inconsiderable figure as novelist, playwright, lover of the visual arts, and, above all, wit. It matters of course in considering his quarrels with the moral and social establishment that he incurred disgraceful moralizing condemnation and legal persecution, because he was, as we now say, gay. But that can be put on one side, since it was Wilde himself, and not his homophobic critics, who first defined his own aesthetic stance in opposition to Morality, which he unreflectively identified with morality. It was from the outset a principal target for his wit, sometimes in his own voice, sometimes in the voices of characters in his plays and novels. "Conscience and cowardice are really the same thing, Basil. Conscience is the trade name of the firm. That is all" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*). And "Morality is simply the attitude that we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike" (*An Ideal Husband*). The aphorism is Wilde's chosen genre. He does not argue. He mocks. His aim is to amuse some and to embarrass others, to amuse some by embarrassing others. What such aphorisms are designed to suggest is both that it is the feelings expressed in their judgments by the adherents of Morality that give those judgments their distinctive character and that those feelings are unacknowledged and discreditable. So Wilde's critique of Morality is an expressivist critique.

By putting his aphorisms into the mouth of fictional characters, Wilde made it possible for him, when convenient, to disown them. And sometimes he did. Yet he also made it clear that the standpoint of the artist has to be one external to Morality, indeed, on Wilde's view, to all moralities. "An artist has no ethical sympathies at all," he wrote. "Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter" (letter to the *Scots Observer*). Every artist is more than an artist, someone who needs to know not only what Wilde is happy to tell him, how not to live, but also how to live. Here in the end Wilde fails his readers, as he failed himself. He could not move, seemed to have no inclination to move, beyond his own inconsistencies. "Consistency," he said, "is the last refuge of the unimaginative." What he took to be his socialism – it was in fact anarchism – and his conversion to the Catholic faith suggest directions that he might have taken, but for his early death. But his politics was that of a

fantasy Utopia, even if we grant him that "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at," and his Catholicism came too late in his life. It is true that he declared that "Life itself is an art, and modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it,"<sup>4</sup> but he failed to observe that those who lead stylish lives are rarely great artists and that great artists rarely lead stylish lives. Nonetheless Wilde's insights make it impossible to avoid two questions.

The first concerns the due place of the arts in human life. On the view characteristic of liberal modernity, it is up to each individual to decide how it is best for her or him to live, and there are no standards by which one individual's rank ordering of goods can be shown to be superior to another's, provided that each is adequately well informed and has avoided incoherence. Yet the cultures of modernity are notable for their extraordinary achievements in various arts, in music, opera, and ballet, in painting, sculpture, and architecture, and it is common to characterize those achievements in terms that suggest that someone who has an opportunity and ability to enjoy and learn from at least some of those achievements, but fails to do so, may be a defective human being, and that someone responsible for the care of children who could provide them with that opportunity and ability, but fails to do so, does them an injustice. If we have good reason so to judge, then it seems that there are some goods constitutive of the good life for human beings that are such independently of and prior to our choices and preferences and that failure to have due regard for such goods and failure to share them with others are kinds of moral failure. If this is so, then the relationship between, on the one hand, our conception of goods and of the good and, on the other, our grasp of the requirements of morality must be other than it is commonly taken to be by the adherents of Morality. Moreover, for our imagined reflective agent it is of the first importance that these same considerations put in question what is implied by Frankfurt's account of our practical lives and especially by his claim that what we should care about must be determined for each of us by what in the end we do in fact care about, whatever it happens to be. I argued earlier (Chapter 1, section 1.7) that someone convinced of the truth of expressivism might find reason to adopt Frankfurt's account of the practical life. But Wilde now suggests a crucial objection to that account.

When for the first time, as a result of some chance encounter some particular great work of art makes a sufficiently disturbing and singular

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985, p. 985.

impact on someone who has hitherto found nothing in art to care about, she or he will be compelled to recognize that, but for that chance event, they might have spent their whole lives not caring about what they should have been caring about. They are unable to judge the work by the standards that they have hitherto taken for granted. It is rather that the work imposes its standards on them. From then on they cannot but acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, that there is some measure of human goods, goods that contribute to our flourishing, that is independent of their own particular concerns, cares, attitudes, and feelings, indeed independent of the concerns, cares, attitudes, and feelings of any particular agent, even if they cannot say what it is. In passing a negative judgment on the life that, but for chance, they would have led, they cannot but quarrel with Frankfurt. But this is not the only important claim that Wilde discredits.

Another question that Wilde makes inescapable is that so often posed in terms of Gauguin. If great art has the kind of value that he claims for it, may it not sometimes be the case that artists in pursuit of their ends have to violate and are justified in violating the requirements imposed by moral rules, whether the rules of Morality or of some other morality? A case in point is Graham Sutherland's portrait of Winston Churchill. The members of the House of Commons had commissioned the painting of this portrait on the occasion of Churchill's retirement from the House in gratitude for his long and impressive career as a parliamentarian. Their and his expectation had been that this gift and its ceremonial presentation would give him and them the pleasure ordinarily associated with such gifts and such occasions. They had not reckoned with the extraordinary insights and skills of the painter. What was unveiled at the presentation was a shockingly truthful portrait of Churchill as the victim of fatigue and old age, a face whose lines and planes communicated the imminent dissolution of a personality. Those who cared most for Churchill found it difficult to look at the painting. His wife first hid it and then destroyed it.

Sutherland had, I presume, not acted with the intention of hurting, yet he must have known that his painting was bound to cause pain to Churchill and to those close to him. He had spoiled an otherwise happy occasion. When I asked E. H. Gombrich what he thought of the painting, he replied "Breach of contract!" Yet the painting was a great and truthful achievement as a work of art. Was Sutherland therefore justified in painting as he did? If so, then it seems the good of artistic achievement can outweigh moral considerations, as Wilde suggests. If not, then it seems art is to be allowed to express only what morality permits, a conclusion that Wilde mocked. What are we to think? Or rather what is our imagined reflective

agent to think? What part might the questions elicited by Wilde play in her thinking?

Had she read Wilde, his attitude to the injunctions of Morality might well have initially reinforced her conviction that it is only through an expressivist account of the authority imputed to them that we can understand how they function and with it her view that what she had taken to be a conflict between the claims of Morality and those of gratitude, friendship, and family ties was in fact a conflict between two sets of feelings and attitudes which it was up to her to resolve by rendering her feelings and attitudes consistent and coherent. But Wilde's story is also relevant to the tasks that confront her as she sets about that work of psychological resolution. For in trying to answer the question 'About what should I most care?' Wilde's insistence on the value of the arts should give her strong reason to pause and consider.

Suppose that she herself has become seriously committed to engaging with some art, classical music, say. Initially, she was impressed by friends who found that art rewarding but was puzzled as to why that was so. So she sets herself to learn, asking advice about concerts and moving from appreciation of music that engages easily – some Mozart, some Schubert songs – to more difficult listening, while learning the piano, initially from Bartok's *Mikrokosmos*, whose genius is to take the beginner from a standing start to the easiest Bach. As she moves forward, she becomes able to ask questions that at first she would not have understood, but only because she has become able to appreciate works that at first she would not have been able to hear, let alone appreciate. She has learned to perceive what without this kind of initiation she would never have perceived. She will also have learned to distinguish two different kinds of aesthetic judgment.

There are first the judgments of those, like herself at the outset, who listen to classical music only casually and occasionally, and who respond with uninformed enthusiasm or distaste or incomprehension to this or that work or part of a work. Their judgments express a genuine enjoyment or lack of enjoyment in a straightforward way, and an expressivist account of those judgments does them no injustice. Very different are the judgments of the musically educated listener and even more of the performer, judgments expressed in the kind and degree of attention that they give to particular passages and to the work as a whole, and to different interpretations of the score, and in their returning to this or that work again and again. Such judgments require an ability to recognize and to respond to different kinds of greatness, to Bach and to Chopin and to Schönberg. They require, too, a recognition that there are some works for which one is not yet ready,

works whose greatness one can only at present appreciate imperfectly, such as, for perhaps almost everyone, Beethoven's op. 131.

For this second class of judgments, judgments whose formulation in words characteristically fails to convey what needs to be communicated (How little to the point it would be to say "What a very great work op. 131 is!"), an expressivist account is plainly inadequate. Such judgments make the kind of claim that they do, only because and insofar as they express the feelings and attitudes of those musically educated enough to be entitled to pass judgment, of those who have learned how to judge. So what do we mean when we call such musical goods goods, and how are we to characterize the claim that they justifiably make upon our interest and attention? What would someone be doing who recognized that such goods can be very great goods, but decided that for him they have to be set aside, because their pursuit would distract him from doing what he takes it to be his moral duty to do? If our imagined reflective agent, who was enquiring what weight she should give to moral considerations in trying to resolve her dilemma, has followed the argument about the arts up to this point, she may feel more perplexed than ever.

It is not that no progress has been made. Even if Wilde's characterization of the standpoint of the artist will not do, he was clearly right in suggesting both that something of great significance is at stake in someone's decision to take the goods to be achieved in and through each of the arts with great seriousness and that we will not have understood what a commitment to morality is, unless we can give an account of the kind of weight that we should give to moral considerations, when they conflict with aesthetic achievement. Our imagined reflective agent cannot afford to focus only on her own dilemma, in which moral considerations have to be weighed against considerations of gratitude and friendship, but must take into account a wider range of dilemmas. How is she to do this? Perhaps by asking what kind of person she will have to become, if she is to be able to find her way through different kinds of conflicting demands. This is a question that philosophers have rarely asked. It is among the questions posed by D. H. Lawrence.

### 3.9 Morality put in question by D. H. Lawrence

For Lawrence what makes so many of our judgments problematic is that we are too often unable to recognize our feelings for what they are. Had Lawrence come across the expressivist thesis that our evaluative and normative judgments express our feeling and attitudes, his response might

well have been one of alarm. For our feelings are apt to betray us and our attitudes are apt to obstruct our identifications of our feelings. "The moral instinct of the man in the street is largely the emotional defence of an old habit."<sup>5</sup> That habit is one of seeing oneself and identifying one's feelings in stock and conventional ways with the result that one does not see what is there to be seen and does not know what one feels. The task of the artist, of painters, poets, novelists, is to enable us to see and to feel by showing us what there is to be seen and to be felt, putting us into a new relationship to ourselves, to others, to things. "A new relationship between ourselves and the universe means a new morality."<sup>6</sup>

Lawrence thus, as an artist, understood himself as undermining the established morality of the social order, whatever it might be, in the name of a new and better morality. The wrongheaded attacks on his novels as immoral, and especially the banning of *The Rainbow* and of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, only confirmed him in this stance. In fact however, as with the vicious treatment of Wilde, the longer term effect of these attacks was to liberalize the established morality. I noted earlier that there are both liberal and conservative versions of Morality. I note now that the line between what is accounted liberal and what conservative also varies with time and place. But I note, too, that Lawrence would have found himself in most ways as much at odds with the liberalized Morality of the later twentieth century as with the Morality of his own time. For every established morality, on his view, inculcates modes of perception and feeling that the artist teaches us to distrust.

Lawrence invites us now, as much as his contemporary readers, to ask which of our feelings we should trust and which distrust. There are indeed those feelings and desires that belong to us as a living animal, but generally and characteristically we are miseducated, so that our feelings are shaped by our social environment. The roles imposed upon us require that we feel as and what we are supposed to feel and desire as and what we are supposed to desire, with the result that "a man who is *emotionally* educated is as rare as a phoenix."<sup>7</sup> "It is cruelly sad to see men caught in the clutches of the past, working automatically in the spell of an authorized desire that is a desire no longer."<sup>8</sup> One central task that Lawrence set himself in his

<sup>5</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "Art and Morality," in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers, 1936*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 521.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>7</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "John Galsworthy," in *Phoenix*, p. 539.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Catherine Carswell, quoted in her *The Savage Pilgrimage: A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1951, p. 59.

novels was to show what happened to those who substitute for feelings and desires that are genuinely their own the feelings and desires authorized by the established social order. So it is with Gerald in *Women in Love*, to whom what matters is that individuals act so as to function well in their assigned role, whatever the effect on their character.

"Was a miner a good miner? Then he was complete. Was a manager a good manager? That was enough. Gerald himself, who was responsible for all this industry, was he a good director? If he were, he had fulfilled his life. The rest was by-play." When the Brangwen sisters discuss him, Ursula says ". . . He'll have to die soon when he's made every possible improvement, and there will be nothing more to improve. He's got go, anyhow." "Certainly he's got go," said Gudrun. "In fact I've never seen a man that showed signs of so much. The unfortunate thing is, where does his go go to, what becomes of it?" "Oh I know," said Ursula. "It goes in applying the latest appliances." The same traits that betray Gerald in his relationships with both women and men – traits all too common in a technologically mesmerized culture such as our own; Gerald would nowadays be Apple's or Amazon's or Google's ideal executive – render him unable to learn what he needs to learn. So how did Lawrence think it possible to learn? It matters that he was not only a novelist, but also a poet and an essayist.

As poet he communicates both the immediacy of sense experience and emotions that are at once elicited and transformed by that which is sensed: a snake, fig trees, gentians, hummingbirds, grapes. In his poetry Lawrence uses words that not only describe, but evoke, words that express the response of the human animal to other animals, of human nature to other natures.<sup>9</sup> If Lawrence was right, many of us should find this poetry disturbing and unsettling. (It cannot have surprised him how much T. S. Eliot disliked it.) But, on Lawrence's account, we need to be disturbed and unsettled, if we are to be educated in how to be at one with ourselves and with others. What Lawrence's greatest novels show us is the various forms that failure to be so educated can take. One source of such failure is to be guided by reason rather than by sense and emotion. "Make any people mainly rational in their life, and their inner activity will be the activity of destruction."<sup>10</sup> Yet what a careful reading of those essays makes clear is that the conception of reason that led him to speak of reason in this way was itself an inadequate conception, one that failed to do justice to the fact that what he was deploying in his novels were narratives that were

<sup>9</sup> On Lawrence's poetry, see Santanu Das, "Lawrence's Sense-Words," *Essays in Criticism* 62, 1 (January 2012): 58–82.

<sup>10</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "Introduction to *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Giovanni Verga," in *Phoenix*, p. 245.

also arguments, arguments about what corrupts and undermines human relationships and what rescues and sustains them, arguments that are sound or unsound.

How far Lawrence's novels succeed as arguments does, of course, vary from novel to novel. The greatness of *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Women in Love* is not matched elsewhere. But Lawrence makes one point of the first importance for anyone who, like our imagined reflective agent, has not only found her way out of Morality through an expressivist critique of its claims, but has then entertained the possibility of making Frankfurt's account of the practical life her own, by assenting to his thesis that what she cares about provides the only defensible standard for determining her evaluative and normative judgments. Such a one has already of course encountered one difficulty in accepting Frankfurt's view as a result of reflecting on Wilde's conception of the values of the artist. For, in the arts at least, what someone cares about depends on what they have learned to value, and the value that they have come to discover is independent of their previous feelings or carings. Lawrence adds a second difficulty.

Someone who is educable in respect of their sensations, perceptions, and emotions, on Lawrence's view, is someone who is open to the possibility that what they do in fact care about is the outcome of their own inadequacies and needs to be corrected. That is, they become educable only if they have a higher order desire to care as they, given their situation and relationships, should care. But, if Lawrence is right, then there must be some standard by which we, or perhaps others who know us well, can identify our inadequacies and contrast what we do care about with what we should care about. It is one of the strengths of Frankfurt's account that attempts to say what that standard might be have so often failed. What did Lawrence take it to be? In his early polemic against Benjamin Franklin's catalogue of what Franklin took to be the virtues, Lawrence formulated a maxim that he repeated elsewhere: "Resolve to abide by your own deepest promptings . . ." That maxim badly needs spelling out further, but Lawrence takes us only part of the way. He shows us what it is to remain superficial in one's grasp of one's own feelings and in responsiveness to others. He shows us what it is to be open to overcoming that superficiality. But when he tries to go beyond this, he is notably less successful.

Lawrence's hostility to psychoanalysis deprived him of one set of resources for spelling out his maxim further. More generally, he was suspicious of what philosophical theorizing had become. "Plato's Dialogues are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days

of myth. Then they went and parted, like a nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy and philosophy went abstract-dry. The two should come together again – in the novel.<sup>11</sup> Yet what Lawrence the novelist shows us is how hard it is to do this and how the result of attempting it is generally a bad novel. Happily, we have philosophical resources that were unavailable to Lawrence.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the philosopher who provided them was as averse to Aristotle, Aquinas, and Kant as Lawrence was. I refer of course to Bernard Williams. Late in life, reflecting on his work in an interview, Williams remarked that "If there's one theme in all my work it's about authenticity and self-expression. It's the idea that some things are in some real sense really you, or express what you are and others aren't." He then refers to Lawrence's maxim – in Williams' version "Find your deepest impulse and follow that" – saying of Lawrence that he "is an author I always found difficult but he sure made an impression upon me with that remark." So, although Lawrence himself takes us no further, he provided Williams with a starting point for philosophical enquiry. That starting point, I shall suggest, is a good place to begin for anyone who, like the reflective agent whom we have been imagining, has drawn upon the resources of expressivism in distancing herself from the misleading claims of Morality, but who has also understood the limitations of expressivism, who has understood both why it would be a mistake to follow either Hume or Frankfurt too closely in their accounts of morality and the practical life, who has understood what Lawrence has to teach us. Let me explain further by listing some of the conditions which, on Williams' view, any adequate treatment of the subject matter of ethics and politics must satisfy.

### 3.10 Morality put in question by Bernard Williams

No summary can do justice to the complexity and the depth of Williams' thinking, and I am in any case concerned only with one line of thought that he developed. However, first let me pick out some characteristics of his thinking which together made not just the content of his moral and political philosophy, but also his attitude to his discipline distinctive. The first is his rejection of morality, which he came to refer to as "the peculiar institution"<sup>12</sup> and treated as only one among the varieties of ethical thought

<sup>11</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "Surgery for the Novel – or a Bomb," in *Phoenix*, p. 520.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, chapter 10.

and practice. What Williams meant by 'morality' were certain features of that system of thought and practice to which I have given the name 'Morality', and his grounds for rejecting its claims were very close to my grounds for rejecting the claims of Morality. Williams takes the concept central to morality to be that of moral obligation. What moral obligation requires is impersonal and universal, binding all – "Moral obligation is inescapable"<sup>13</sup> – and binding everyone equally. The requirements imposed by its principles are overriding<sup>14</sup> and consistent, both as principles and in their application to particular cases. To violate them is to incur blame from right-minded agents.

Williams not only rejects the claims of morality. He rejects the accounts of and the defenses of morality by both utilitarians and Kantians. Neither body of theory can supply a plausible account of the psychology of the practical life, and both fail to recognize the limits and the limitations of moral theorizing. Two aspects of this failure are especially important. Neither can allow for the ineliminable messiness of our practical lives, for the heterogeneity of the considerations that we need to take into account both in making particular decisions and more generally in deciding how to live. What makes justice important is one thing, what makes truthfulness important another, what makes loyalty to our friends important a third. But it is not only such heterogeneity that moral theorizing conceals from view. There are a multiplicity of goods to be acknowledged and of evils to be avoided, and in many situations we can act consistently with one principle that we have hitherto honored only by violating another such principle. So Williams imagined a situation in which someone can save a number of lives by himself agreeing to execute an innocent man. Whatever he chooses to do, he will have done something dreadful, and neither utilitarian nor Kantian formulas allow us to recognize this adequately.

The impersonality and universality ascribed to the requirements of morality, whether in utilitarian, Kantian, or other terms, also obscure another central aspect of our lives, the place in each life of commitments and projects that matter to that individual in key part just because they are *hers* or *his*, commitments and projects not lightly to be set aside, even when allegiance to them turns out to be incompatible with satisfying the requirements of morality. Those commitments and projects provide a key part of the answer that each agent gives to the inescapable question 'How shall I live?', a question too often ignored, on Williams' view, by modern moral theorists. It matters that in answering that question we recognize our

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.



historical situatedness and that the conditions of modernity leave us without the resources on which individuals were able to draw in traditional societies. Yet nostalgia for the past is a disabling emotion and modernity provides a range of areas in which important values are at stake: personal life, the arts, politics. In each of these areas Williams had his own commitments. The mistake, he believed, was to try to understand such commitments in terms of some single theoretical stance.

I have so far summarized Williams' conclusions rather than his arguments, and this for two reasons. The first is that it was those conclusions that put him – “arguably the greatest British philosopher of his era” as the *Guardian* said in its obituary notice in 2003 – at odds with every other major figure in the discipline. Indeed, the vast majority of those now at work in academic moral philosophy continue to write as though Williams had never existed, although this is a more interesting fact about them than it is about Williams. My second reason is that I am here concerned with Williams' arguments only as they bear upon one particular line of thought that he developed, sometimes tentatively, from 1965 onwards.

In earlier sections of this essay, I have been tracing the path that might have been taken by a reflective agent who had, like Williams, rejected the claims of Morality and who had, also, again like Williams, thought her way through and beyond expressivism. The differences between our imagined agent and Williams are of course very great. She, unlike him, is not an academic philosopher, but someone forced into philosophical enquiry by persistent and intelligent practical reflection. He, unlike her, was extraordinarily gifted in a number of fields, as fighter pilot, as teacher of philosophy, in the appreciation of opera, as administrator of a college, and as a public servant on several commissions of enquiry in the United Kingdom. Williams in his admirable sophistication was about as far from the man in the street or the woman in the Clapham omnibus as it is possible to get. Nonetheless, the path that led him to his conclusions was, I want to suggest, a path that anyone persistently and intelligently reflective might well have come close to following had they taken due account of the expressivist critique of Morality, of the limitations of expressivism, of the example of Wilde, and of the art and teaching of Lawrence. In one particular line of thought at least, Williams spoke not just for himself but also for others, albeit others typically innocent of the prejudices of current academic moral philosophy. So what was that path? And to what did it lead?

Begin with Williams' critique of expressivism (in “Morality and the Emotions,” his Inaugural Lecture at Bedford College in 1965, published in

1973).<sup>15</sup> His complaint is that what expressivists say about the relationship between our moral convictions and judgments and our emotions is at too high a level of generality and so fails to capture the significant relationships between particular emotions or aspects of emotions and our convictions and judgments. One such relationship is that between the strength of feeling that someone exhibits on a moral issue and the strength of that someone's convictions, a connection such that Williams takes the former to be, except in a few special cases, a *criterion* of the latter. So the issue of sincerity, of what it is not to disguise one's feelings from oneself or others, becomes central at an early stage. But this is not the only respect in which, on Williams' view, particular emotions are morally important.

Contemporary moral philosophers had, so he charges, ignored “the ways in which various emotions may be considered as destructive, mean or hateful, while others appear as creative, generous, admirable, or – merely – such as one would hope from a decent human being.”<sup>16</sup> To direct a particular emotion toward some object is often to pass judgment on that object, and to understand what makes it appropriate to feel as we do toward this or that object is something that requires moral education. “If such education does not revolve round such issues as what to fear, what to be angry about, what – if anything – to despise, where to draw the line between kindness and a stupid sentimentality – I do not know what it is.”<sup>17</sup> There is thus a double connection between emotion and evaluation. In judging that or presupposing that some particular expression of emotion is appropriate or inappropriate, we evaluate it. And in feeling or giving vent to our own emotions, sometimes in response to expressions of emotion by others, we characteristically treat their objects as deserving and inviting our responses to them.

Someone who acts from compassion, say, or remorse – Williams' two examples – sees the situation in which he acts in a certain light. Seen in that light, that situation provides the agent with grounds for acting as he does, compassionately or so as to repair some wrong. We cannot understand what it is for that individual to see things as he does, to reason and to act as he does “without reference to the emotional structure of his thought and action.”<sup>18</sup> Yet there is a difference between the way in which the functioning of that emotional structure appears to others and the way in which it appears to the agent her or himself. Williams dismisses the view that someone could *decide* to adopt a set of moral principles, asserting that

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Williams, “Morality and the Emotions,” in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers, 1956–1972*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 207–229.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

"We see a man's genuine convictions as coming from somewhere deeper in him than that," although "what we see as coming from deeper in him, he . . . may see as coming from outside him."<sup>19</sup>

The metaphor of depth is important. So is the word 'genuine' with its echoes of Lawrence. If we are to understand our moral convictions, we must not mistake the superficial for the deep or the fake for the genuine. But, even if we do not make these mistakes, there may well be that in our convictions that we do not understand or that we misunderstand. Our deliberations, so it seems, must begin from convictions for some of which we can give no further reason, convictions that, although they are not to be understood as the emotivists understood them, are expressed in emotion, so that an observer would be unable to characterize either those convictions or the relevant emotions independently of one another. Those thoughts were still with Williams when he wrote *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*,<sup>20</sup> but they then found a place within Williams' overview of the discipline of moral philosophy. About this overview two things need to be remarked.

The first has to do with content. Much of *Morality* has to do with what morality is not. (Williams did not yet in 1972 use 'morality' as the name of that to which he was opposed.) And much of *Morality* has to do with the mistakes of moral philosophers. What the reader is then invited to reflect on is a small set of possibilities that remain open. But the nature of that invitation also needs to be remarked, since it is a matter not only of content, but also of style. Anyone who goes from the text of the Inaugural Lecture to that of *Morality* will be struck by the contrast between the prosaic, analytical earnestness of the former and the liveliness, wit, even gaiety of the latter. Introductory texts are commonly designed to induce a respectful regard for the discipline thus introduced. Williams, however, engages his readers by warning them against the disciplinary pieties: "most moral philosophy at most times has been empty and boring" and "Contemporary moral philosophy has found an original way of being boring."<sup>21</sup> Here Williams echoes Wilde. The initial problem is one of the style in which moral philosophy is to be written and spoken "in the deepest sense of 'style' in which to discover the right style is to discover what you are really trying to do."<sup>22</sup>

The reader is then through both argument and style invited not only to accept a set of negative conclusions, but also to pose questions about what moral stances should be taken seriously here and now, questions

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. ix and x. <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

that reopen the enquiries of the Inaugural Lecture. There, as we noted, agents were described as experiencing certain moral demands that in fact derive from some deep level of their emotions as having an external source. Williams now suggests that an agent may recognize the true source of such demands, when she or he becomes engaged by a type of moral outlook at the heart of which there is "an appeal to something *there* in human life which has to be discovered, trusted, followed, possibly in grave ignorance of the outcome."<sup>23</sup> It is at this point that Williams explicitly endorses Lawrence's injunction, "Find your deepest impulse and follow that," commenting that the notion "that there is something that is one's deepest impulse, that there is a discovery to be made here . . . and . . . that one trusts what is so discovered, although unclear where it will lead – these . . . are the point."<sup>24</sup> Williams classes this moral outlook with others that, instead of offering happiness, "demand authenticity" and briefly entertains the thought that perhaps it "rests on an illusion." In fact he was to take it with great seriousness for the next thirty years, as the quotation from the 2002 interview shows.

The problem for Williams was with the notion of authenticity. We can only be true to our deepest feelings if we are disciplined enough to be aware of them and truthful about what they are. Without such awareness and such truthfulness, deliberation will begin in the wrong place. "I must deliberate *from* what I am. Truthfulness requires trust in that . . ." The 'I' who so deliberates has, so Williams believed, the "possibility of a meaningful individual life, one that does not reject society, and indeed shares its perceptions with other people to a considerable degree, but yet is enough unlike others, in its opacities and disorder as well as in its reasoned intentions to make it *somebody's*."<sup>25</sup> What matters is that the deliberation through which that 'I' arrives at its reasoned intentions not only begins where it should, but then follows the right path, so that it issues in the right kind of life. "A has reason to  $\emptyset$  only if there is a *sound deliberative route* from A's subjective motivational set . . . to A's  $\emptyset$ ing."<sup>26</sup>

Williams emphasized that we should not think of an agent's subjective motivational set – her or his desires, dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, projects, and commitments – "as statically given. The process of deliberation can have all sorts of effects on" it.<sup>27</sup> And over time it will change in various ways. But nothing can be a

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85. <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 200 and p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Williams, "Postscript: Some Further Notes on Internal and External Reasons," in *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, ed. Elijah Millgram, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 105.

reason for anyone that is not actually or potentially a motivating reason. Critics of Williams have insisted that, if understood broadly enough, this formula will accommodate any view of reasons. Williams intended it, however, to exclude any alleged reason that purports to be a reason for anyone whatsoever in this or that type of situation. My reasons must be peculiarly mine, reasons grounded in my psychological history. They need not be and often will not be in the least self-interested. They must be expressions of this or that particular self.

What then is it that can give me confidence on some particular occasion that my deliberations are trustworthy? Williams had much to say that is, directly or indirectly, relevant to answering this question. There are on the one hand his arguments in support of some of his own practical conclusions on issues as various as the harm that is or is not done by pornography, the responses appropriate to this or that opera, or why we should not (Williams when young) or should (Williams when older) take Nietzsche seriously. There are on the other his philosophical reflections on what kind of liberalism is defensible and what not, and on why some of the idioms of ancient Greek tragic thought provide a more adequate vocabulary for ethical reflection than the post-Christian vocabulary of modernity, and his genealogical enquiry into the indispensability of truthfulness for a certain sort of life. Yet, when all is said and done, crucial aspects of what Williams was saying to us about deliberation and about our reliance on our deepest feelings remain obscure.

Commonly, when someone says that about a philosopher, the remark is taken to be at least critical and perhaps hostile. Yet this is not at all what I mean. For perhaps what Williams was talking about is by its nature elusive, and that Williams, who cast important light on so many other areas of our thought, was unable to do better than he did is strong evidence that this is the case. Nonetheless, Williams misled himself and his readers. What I am going to argue is that Williams in pursuing the line of thought that led to his conclusions about deliberation was bound to find it difficult, perhaps impossible to say more than he said. But since I take it that this same line of thought is that which anyone in our time who had rejected the claims of Morality and who had thought their way through and beyond expressivism with sufficient intelligence and pertinacity would be likely to find themselves following, this is not just an argument about Williams. What then is it about this line of thought that it issues both in a certain kind of inarticulateness and in significant error and misunderstanding?

Williams' rejection of morality was accompanied by a recognition not only that "morality is not an invention of philosophers. It is the outlook, or,

incoherently part of the outlook, of almost all of us,"<sup>28</sup> but also that what the philosophers of morality have tried to supply for plain nonphilosophical persons are types of argument that such persons can employ to justify their particular judgments and decisions. Such plain persons are, however, led astray by such philosophers, so that they fail to understand that "To arrive at the conclusion that one must do a certain thing is, typically, to make a discovery – a discovery which is, always minimally and sometimes substantially, a discovery about oneself."<sup>29</sup> Yet, if and when they do come to understand this, what are they to reply on a particular occasion to someone who suggests that, far from making a discovery, they may instead be the victims of a piece of sophisticated self-deception?

What they would have to show is that the feelings expressed in the course of arriving at their conclusions were both genuinely and deeply theirs, yet this, it seems, is, on Williams' view, something that can be discerned only from a first person point of view. "Practical thought is radically first personal."<sup>30</sup> At this point Lawrence provided the plain person with resources that Williams is unable to supply. For when Lawrence as a novelist shows us characters who are indeed deceived as to the depth or the genuine character of their emotions, it is only from a third person standpoint that he and his readers are able to perceive and to understand the limitations of those characters' first person standpoint. What agents need, if they are not to be the victims of deception and self-deception is, as I argued earlier, to see and understand themselves as perceptive others see and understand them. What they need is to judge and to act from a first person standpoint informed by a kind of practical self-knowledge that can only be acquired from a third person standpoint. Their confidence in the outcome of their own deliberative activities will be well founded only if it resembles in important respects the confidence that someone else might have in that outcome. But is such a thing possible?

Consider the predicament of our imagined agent, persistent and intelligent as she is, who, having found her way through and out of expressivism, and having concluded that she has no alternative but to give expression in her judgments and actions to her deepest feelings, to those feelings that are most her own, now has occasion to ask which of her feelings those are. She has been taught hitherto to think of herself in individualistic terms not only in her moral and emotional life but also in her dealings with the agencies of the state and in her transactions in labor and other markets.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 21.

And in turning to others for advice and assistance in identifying her deepest feelings, so that she is not deceived or self-deceived, she initially continues to think in those terms. The interesting question is: Will she be able to solve or resolve this problem about deception and self-deception without abandoning or at the least severely modifying this mode of thought? It is in and through our choices that our feelings, impulses, and desires find expression in our practical lives, and the more important the choice for the overall direction of our lives the more important it is to us to be aware of what it is that we really want and to be sure that we are not the victims of deception or self-deception. We need then to envisage some moment of choice in the life of our imagined agent when a good deal is at stake for her in the outcome of that choice.

### 3.11 Questions posed to and by Williams

The problem is that as we have imagined our agent so far, we have said nothing at all about most aspects of her life. Indeed this abstraction from the detail of psychological and social circumstance, so characteristic of examples discussed by moral philosophers, was necessary, if the example was to do the work that I intended it to do and hope that it has done. But, if we are to understand choices in which something of significance is at stake for an agent, we need to consider a number of dimensions of the situations in which choices are made and of the characteristics and relationships of the agents who make them, and we need to consider choices of different kinds. The agent whom we imagined having to decide which of her feelings were to govern her actions in a particular case would do well to reflect upon some of her own past choices. Consider some ways in which such an agent may look back on a past decision, one, say, in which that agent had had to choose between some more adventurous and insecure way of life, as a musician or a political organizer or a circus performer, and some more secure and predictable future, as a clerk in local government or a teacher or a garbage collector.

One possibility is that she will look back on the decision that she made without any regrets, congratulating herself for having realized that, although she had had at that time genuinely good reasons for choosing otherwise than as she did, her temperament was such that she would have always been a dissatisfied and frustrated person, if she had not chosen as she did. Another possibility is that she will have become just such a dissatisfied and frustrated person, now regretting her past choice, but now having no alternative but to live with the choice that she then made. A third possibility

is that she will now have no doubt that she then made the right choice – and she did make the right choice – but nonetheless will recognize that she still has hankerings for the kind of life that she renounced. And a fourth possibility is that she will now have no doubt that she then made the right choice, but that she did in fact make the wrong choice and her continuing hankerings for the kind of life that is now unavailable to her are symptoms of this. These four are far from the only possibilities, but they suggest some initial questions that need to be posed about such choices.

Such choices are difficult insofar as agents have more or less indeterminate conflicting desires for themselves or for others. So they have to become aware of what they want and of why they want it. They have to recognize how the consequences of choosing this or that alternative may be to alter their present desires. They have to think about the implications of their choices for others, especially for those close to them, and about how far and why they do, and they should care about those implications. They need, that is to say, self-knowledge of a kind that it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve without the help of others who know them well as a result of having interacted with them over extended periods of time. But they need more than this kind of self-knowledge. They also need to know whether they are describing the alternatives between which they are choosing realistically and whether they have or will be able to acquire the abilities and the skills that they will need in each case. Here, too, they may need to consult with relevant others. What then is it to be well placed and what is it to be badly placed in one's relationships with others in respect of the acquisition of such knowledge and such self-knowledge?

About what others should we be thinking when we try to answer this question? About family members, often of more than one generation, about friends, about coworkers who know what goes well for them and for us in the workplace and what goes badly, about those with whom we share activities and responsibilities in, say, the local school, in soccer or basketball teams, in theatre groups or in music making. At once it is obvious that individuals may stand in very different kinds of relationships to those with whom they interact and that the network of relationships in which agents find themselves in their periods of decision making may be of very different kinds, just as they themselves may differ from one another in temperament, in inclinations, and in the history that has brought them to this point. Consider three notably different possibilities.

The first is that the others with whom the agent interacts share to a large extent one and the same conventional view of what the realistic possibilities are at each stage of a human life. They are imaginatively limited. It is

not that none of them sees and feels the attractions of breaking out and breaking free from conventional pathways, but that even those who do thus see and feel have a conception of what is to break out and break free that is itself conventional, limited, and unimaginative. Worse still, among their limitations is that they do not know their limitations. Are there social milieus of this kind? That there are I do not doubt, but what is as important is that some individuals, especially but not only adolescents, may believe that this is how things are in their milieu, whether this is in fact so or not. Such individuals may recognize that they need to consult others in order to obtain information, but that otherwise they have to free themselves from the advice and influence of others so that their choice may be genuinely their own, not one that expresses the shared preconceptions and prejudices of their milieu. "What I have to ensure," says such a one to herself, although she has never heard of D. H. Lawrence or Bernard Williams, "is that my choice is really *mine!* Otherwise I am bound to regret it later."

A second possibility is that the others with whom the agent interacts and to whom the agent has become close are very different from each other in respect of their past experiences, their occupations, their hopes and expectations, their religious and irreligious views of the world. They see the choice that the agent has to make in very different lights, and this is not a matter of different information that they have. Those who have unwillingly led dangerous and precarious lives as, say, refugees see the security of life as a clerk or a garbage collector as something wonderful, only to be thought of as dull and conventional by those who do not know what the world is like. Those who have become ambitious and competitive advise that the agent should add more possibilities to her list of alternatives. And correspondingly they identify the agent's capabilities and possibilities by different measures. Where in the previous example the agent was offered too few alternatives, here she is offered too many and too many alternative standards for choosing between them. What she may well feel is that not only is the choice inescapably and burdensomely her own, but so too is her choice of how to choose.

Suppose now, however, a third case in which the relevant set of others are in many respects as diverse as in the previous case but differ in that they include some who not only are in general perceptive about the motivations of others and the outcomes of those motivations but have known our imagined agent long enough and well enough to be able to give her well-grounded advice. She in turn knows them well enough to have a justified confidence in their reasoning and their judgments. So she is able to understand how she appears and how her choice appears from a third person point of view. She is able to correct some of her previous

judgments about herself and through extended discussion with some of these others to consider possibilities that she had not yet envisaged. Her choice remains inescapably her own, but the deliberations in which she engages are informed by third person as well as first person judgments and in making her final choice she is, in important respects, relying on and trusting in others. Indeed how she now reasons may be the result of her having learned from those others that she has reason to be suspicious of some of her own inclinations and tendencies.

What in these circumstances might she make of Lawrence's injunction to follow, to be true to, her deepest impulse? The metaphor of depth may point her in one or more of three directions. That in us which is taken to be deep is that which is enduring, ineliminably and importantly part of us, expressed in long-term characteristics of our desires, our commitments, and our loyalties. That in us which is taken to be deep is that which, if we ignore or suppress, will find expression in frustration or regret or resentment or all of these. And that in us which is taken to be deep is that of whose influence upon us we may even at crucial times remain unaware, perhaps because we are insufficiently enquiring, perhaps because of a need – a deep need – not to acknowledge aspects of ourselves and especially of our desires. Yet of course, when we are making choices in which much is at stake, we need to be self-aware and, that is to say, we need to see ourselves and to understand ourselves as honest, perceptive, intelligent, and insightful others see and understand us, with the objectivity that is only possible from a third person standpoint, but a third person standpoint that we have become able to make our own.

It is a grammatical and a philosophical truth that we have to learn how to use the personal pronouns as a set and not one by one. Until I know that, whenever it can be said truly of me by me that "I am doing or feeling such and such," it can be said truly by another to me that "You are doing or feeling such and such," and it can be said truly about me that "She – or he – is doing or feeling such and such," I do not understand what I am saying when I use the pronoun 'I'. It is a psychological and a philosophical truth that, where my desires and dispositions are concerned, I may often have to learn what I can say truly and truthfully about myself only by recognizing and acknowledging the truth of what others say to me and about me. Philosophers have sometimes and understandably focused on those types of sentence used by me to report what sometimes only I can report, such as 'I am in pain', where, when I am in pain and say that I am in pain, others are in no position to correct me. It makes no sense for them to ask "How do you know that you are in pain?" In this respect the first person standpoint is indeed privileged. Yet we do well to remind

ourselves that the same 'I' who was once in pain may or may not remember what caused that pain, how intense it was, or how he responded to it, let alone be aware of how far memories of it are expressed in his present responses. On all these matters, he may have to depend on the trustworthiness of others for confirmation or disconfirmation of his own memories and judgments.

This, of course, Williams would not have denied. But what his account of deliberation does preclude is this: that in the end I have to arrive at the right decision not just for me, here, now, but for anyone so situated. The objectivity that dependence on others can achieve is indeed objectivity, a rescuing of the agent from imprisonment within her or his subjectivity. I am not of course maintaining that we are all equally dependent on others for the kind of self-knowledge that we so often need in making crucial decisions. I am asserting that for all of us in much of our practical deliberation, we need to have a justified confidence in the judgments of others on whom we stand in close relationships, if we are to have a justified confidence in our own first person judgments. Nor is it the case that it is only our understanding of ourselves that may be and often needs to be transformed through our interactions with such others. What we learn from them may include how to think about the objects of our desires in new and more adequate ways, so that on the one hand our desires are changed and on the other we envisage the alternatives between which we have to choose somewhat differently. And I am not maintaining – far from it – that the influence of others is always for the good. The qualities of mind and character of those on whom we come to rely matter enormously and someone whose family or friends or coworkers are unreflective or in love with money or power or celebrity may have to isolate and insulate her or himself from those others, if she is to deliberate well and to make good choices. Yet even with these necessary qualifications, a strong thesis emerges from these examples of situations of choice.

It is that whether an agent's deliberations and choices are or are not defective in various ways depends in key part on the nature of that agent's social relationships and that an agent's deliberations and choices may be most her or his own when that agent's first person standpoint is open to and informed by the third person observations, arguments, and judgments of others. So our imagined agent, confronted by her choice between alternative careers, needs to consider what her social relationships are and have been, something that would not have been suggested to her by Williams' misleading claim that "Practical thought is radically first personal." Indeed, she will now have to think in terms that will put her even further at odds with Williams. For if the strong thesis that I have proposed is true, then

an agent whose motivational set – to use Williams' term – does not allow that agent to learn in appropriate ways from others will be defective as an agent. For she will be apt to be motivated by desires for objects that she has only bad reasons or insufficiently good reasons to desire.

Where, then, has the line of enquiry that we have followed led our imagined agent and where has it led us? We have distinguished that in expressivism which is true and insightful from that which is either trivial or misleading. Expressivism fails as a general account of the semantics of evaluative sentences, but it provides among other things grounds for a critique of and a rejection of the claims of Morality, a critique reinforced by other types of consideration, notably the inability of its leading theoretical voices to settle crucial issues that divide them or to respond adequately to Bernard Williams' indictment. Yet that critique compels us, as our imagined agent discovered, to go beyond expressivism, by raising questions on which it is silent, both about how our practical deliberations are related to our feelings, that is, about what it is that gives us grounds for confidence in those deliberations, and about what kinds of reason we might have for taking something – the extraordinary achievement of Gauguin's paintings, say, or the dramatic and subversive wit of Oscar Wilde or the imaginative insights of D. H. Lawrence's best novels – to be a good and for ranking it in relation to other goods. On the first of these, we have once more incurred a large debt to Bernard Williams, in part because he takes us to a point at which it becomes clear how and why his account of deliberation finally breaks down. On the second, apart from his insightful account of the good of truthfulness, Williams had remarkably little to say, and it is worth asking why this was so. It is, I believe, for two distinct, but mutually reinforcing sets of reasons. His right-minded conviction that there are radically different kinds of good – our reasons for taking justice to be a good seem to him have little or nothing in common with our reasons for taking operative excellence to be a good – led him to endorse Isaiah Berlin's claim that it is a "deep error" to suppose that "all goods, all virtues, all ideals are compatible."<sup>31</sup> Williams then commented: "This is not the platitude that in an imperfect world not all the things we recognize as good are in practice compatible. It is rather that we have no coherent conception of a world without loss, that goods conflict by their very nature, and that there can be no incontestable scheme for harmonizing them."

To hold that goods conflict by their very nature is of course to put oneself at odds with Aristotle, but Williams had additional reasons for rejecting

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Williams, "Introduction" to Isaiah Berlin's *Concepts and Categories*, ed. H. Hardy, New York: Viking Press, 1978, p. xvi.

Aristotle's ethics, reasons that he thought it important to advance over and over again at each stage of his work, although he modified his statement of some of them in response to criticisms by Martha Nussbaum.<sup>32</sup> Three of them are instructive. In *Morality* he disputes Aristotle's thesis that the distinguishing mark of human beings is their intelligence and capacity for rational thought: "To be helplessly in love is in fact as distinctively a human condition as to approve rationally of someone's moral dispositions."<sup>33</sup> In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, he argues that Aristotle's view of the way in which our ethical dispositions are related to our ends and our functioning well as human beings depends upon his teleological account of nature, an account which anyone who inhabits the world of modern science has to reject.<sup>34</sup> And in the same passage he claims that Aristotle can supply no adequate explanation of what he would take to be moral and political error, error which, on an Aristotelian view, we should note, extends to the rejection by so many agents, including Williams, of anything like an Aristotelian conception of themselves and their activities.

Nussbaum persuaded Williams that he had exaggerated the extent to which Aristotle's ethics depends upon his view of biological nature, but he remained convinced that there are concepts central to Aristotelian ethics that can function as they do only if they find application to the natural world. About this I take him to have been in some respects right. So I conclude that all four of his criticisms of Aristotle need to be answered. They have indeed already been provided with philosophical answers within the NeoAristotelian tradition, but it is important to understand how those answers find a place within any adequate statement of the overall claims and commitments in ethics and politics of a contemporary Thomistic Aristotelianism. My next task, therefore, is to deliver just such a statement, one that will give point and purpose to a response to Williams' critique of Aristotle, but that itself begins by addressing a wider set of concerns, taking account of what has been learned in our discussions so far and this in at least four ways.

First, in contrast to my way of proceeding in the first part of this essay, I will need to exhibit and communicate some awareness of the present-day social contexts of the theses and arguments that I will be advancing. It will be important to discover whether and how far NeoAristotelianism

<sup>32</sup> See Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundation of Ethics" and Williams' "Replies," in *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J. E. J. Altham and R. Harrison, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 185-224.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Morality*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 43-44.

can be responsive to and provide a voice for those whose desires, deprivations, concerns, and commitments are defined by their relationship to the contemporary social and economic order. Here the resources that Marx provided at an earlier stage of my argument will again be to the point. Secondly, in evaluating NeoAristotelian and, more specifically, Thomistic claims, I will have to spell out a good deal further what I said at the close of Chapter 2 about the three dimensions of rational justification. Thirdly, I will need to develop further in Aristotelian and Thomistic terms, the thesis about the connections between an agent's desires, decision making, and practical reasoning and that agent's social relationships which emerged from the discussion of Williams' account of deliberation. Fourthly, readers will have noted that I have sometimes dealt brusquely and cavalierly with objections to my point of view. How far they are troubled by this will depend in key part on what their own point of view is. But some of these objections, from my point of view, need to be taken more seriously than others, notably the four types of objection advanced by Williams, and to them I will have to respond further. Finally, through all of this it will be important to remind ourselves recurrently of the overall aim of this enquiry, to understand more adequately the part that our desires and our practical reasoning play in our lives and in their going well or badly. My arguments will lead to the conclusion that the form which gives expression to such understanding is that of narrative and of a kind of narrative which presupposes a NeoAristotelian conception of human activity. This, then, is the agenda for the next chapter of this essay.

astray. They have identified themselves as having an interest that can only be served and a status that can only be preserved if the common goods of family, workplace, and school are not served. Disagreement with them and with those theorists dedicated to the preservation of the economic and political order in which they flourish is therefore of a very different kind from most other theoretical and philosophical disagreements. It is and should be pursued as a prologue to prolonged social conflict.

#### 4.11 Bernard Williams' critique of Aristotelian and Thomistic concepts and arguments: a response

At the end of Chapter 3, I listed Bernard Williams' four major reasons for rejecting Aristotle's ethics and promised to reply to them. It may well seem that the discussions in which I have engaged since then have not only delayed this reply, but have taken us in a different direction. But this is not so. By identifying what is at stake both in the disagreements between Thomistic Aristotelians and other theorists on how our contemporary social and moral condition is to be understood and in the practical disagreements of everyday life, I have already suggested how an Aristotelian reply to Williams might be spelled out. To go further, I will have to draw upon earlier expositions and arguments, and I apologize to those to whom these repetitions seem unnecessary. Begin, then, by considering Williams' charge that Aristotle lacks an adequate account of moral and political error. One initial response would be to catalogue Aristotle's diagnoses of particular types of moral and political failure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Politics*, and elsewhere, the errors of the intemperate and the akratic, of the clever, but imprudent, and of the stupid, of those good at war, but bad at enquiry, such as the Spartans, of those who care too much about money or pleasure or political success. But we could equally well or even better begin from the discussion of types of contemporary practical disagreement in which we have just engaged. If we do so, we may find ourselves characterizing the various types of practical error that we have encountered in either of two different ways, on the one hand describing them in sociological and psychological terms, on the other identifying them as due to lack of the relevant virtues.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that these are alternative or, worse still, rival and incompatible modes of description and identification. Aristotle's account of the virtues, when fully spelled out, is or rather presupposes a psychology and a sociology. To have and to exercise the virtues is to function well in one's social roles as citizen, as member of a household and

family, and so on. A political society or a household functions well only if it educates its members in the exercise of the virtues, and political societies and households are classified and evaluated as adequate or inadequate by reference to just those social relationships – in the case of political societies the relationships of ruling or of being ruled – that are either sustained or undermined by the exercise of the virtues. So the diagnosis of moral and political error may identify the source of error either in the agent her or himself or in her or his social relationships.

To err is to act from a desire for some object that the agent has no good reason to desire. So to act, whether intemperately or akratically, is to have insufficiently disciplined passions. Is that lack of discipline the fault of the agent or of his educators? Or is it due to the established norms governing relationships in that society? Or to all of them? Is Alexander the Great's *hubris* to be blamed only on Alexander or instead or also on Aristotle and his other tutors or instead or also on the norms of the Macedonian royal household? One of the ways in which societies differ is in how the young learn to hold themselves accountable and to respond when called to account by others, and one of the ways in which a society can be defective by Aristotelian standards is in failing to educate them in accountability. The rich, Aristotle noted, do not know how to be ruled (*Politics* IV, 1295b13–16), that is, among other things they generally and characteristically have not learned to make themselves accountable, and so they will also fail as rulers.

Is Aristotle's account of moral and political error adequate? Any contemporary Aristotelian, Thomistic or otherwise, will readily allow that both Aristotle's sociology and his psychology badly need to be corrected and developed by drawing upon the extraordinary achievements of modern sociology from Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel to Garfinkel, Goffman, and Burns, of psychoanalysis, and of such psychologists as Kahneman and Tversky. But, no matter how far corrected, developed, and enriched, Aristotle's account of moral and political error would still fail to satisfy Williams. For Williams would deny, did deny, that we have any conception of what it is for a household or a political society to function well that can be legitimately put to use in the way that Aristotle and Aristotelians put such a conception to use. To judge that a household or a political society is functioning well is to judge from one particular evaluative standpoint, and there are always alternative and rival evaluative standpoints. Where Aristotle sees identifiable error, Williams sees disagreement and disagreement not to be resolved by appeal to any standard derivable from a genuinely empirical sociology or psychology. So Williams' charge that Aristotle provides no adequate account of moral and political error is closely related to



his claim that Aristotle is mistaken in thinking that there is any such thing as *the* good life for human agents

Both depend on his view, shared with Isaiah Berlin and Stuart Hampshire, that the multiplicity and variety of human goods is such and the range of attitudes to those goods is such that there are indefinitely many alternative more or less well worked out conceptions of what it is to live well and no rational grounds for preferring one above the others. Like Berlin and Hampshire, Williams takes it to be of crucial importance that political institutions should be hospitable to and tolerant of a wide range of such conceptions, not identified with or designed to inculcate any one of them: hence their political liberalism and hence too their rejection both of Aristotle's account of what it is for institutions to function well and of his account of the human good. What then is there to be said for this latter? An Aristotelian account addressed to readers whose temper of mind is akin to that of Berlin, Hampshire, and Williams should perhaps proceed through four stages, noting more fully and systematically a number of points that were already sketched in Chapter 1, when Aristotle's views first received attention.

The first is a matter of identifying a set of goods whose contribution to a good life, whatever one's culture or social order, it would be difficult to deny. They are at least eightfold, beginning with good health and a standard of living – food, clothing, shelter – that frees one from destitution. Add to these good family relationships, sufficient education to make good use of opportunities to develop one's powers, work that is productive and rewarding, and good friends. Add further time beyond one's work for activities good in themselves, athletic, aesthetic, intellectual, and the ability of a rational agent to order one's life and to identify and learn from one's mistakes. Many excellent lives are so despite the absence from them of one or more of these. But the more of them that are absent the more resourceful an agent will have to be in coping with the difficulties that their absence causes. Such resourcefulness includes an ability to recognize what would have to be changed and what could be changed either in her or himself in the social and institutional order that the agent inhabits in order to achieve and enjoy the goods constitutive of the good life.

It is of course true, as Berlin in particular emphasized, that we often have to make painful choices between goods, both as individuals and as families or political communities. It may be that I can be a successful athlete or a useful medical researcher, but not both, a good husband and father or a good soldier, but not both. It may be that my community can provide good preschool education or a good theatre, but not both, better transport

services or better care for the aged, but not both. But what matters for the good life is not so much which choice is made as the way in which such choices are made, the nature and quality of the deliberation that goes into the making of them. It is by their initial education as practical reasoners and by their subsequent exercise of their reasoning powers in the making of such choices that agents play their part in determining the goodness of their lives. The substance of the alternatives that they confront does of course differ from culture to culture and social order to social order and differs too depending on an agent's place in her or his social order. Family structures, kinds of productive work, distributions of authority and power take different forms. But there is one and the same need to be able to judge what kind of contribution to the achievement of the agent's individual and common goods each alternative course of action will make. So already at this first stage of the enquiry, we are able to sketch an account of the form that any good life for human beings must take, an account on which there is in fact a surprising amount of agreement.

As it is with goods, so it is also with failures and defeats and evils. About the various ways in which lives can go wrong, some of which we have already remarked, there is once again large agreement. Premature death and disabling illness, crushing poverty and the friendlessness of the excluded and persecuted can rule out the possibility of a good life. Circumstances a little less dire may provide obstacles and frustrations that can be overcome with the kind of resourcefulness that we already saw to be an important and often essential constituent of many good lives. Lack of such resourcefulness can be the result of a failure to learn or an unwillingness to take risks when risk taking is necessary. If we catalogue further the qualities of mind and character that enable agents to confront, overcome, and learn from adversity, we will find that we have constructed a list of virtues necessary for a good life in many different types of situation on which there is a large measure of agreement. But virtues are needed for other reasons too. We are apt to go wrong, as Aristotle pointed out at the very beginning of his enquiry, because we are too open to being seduced by pleasure, because of political ambition, because of the love of money. The good life, we may conclude from this second stage of our enquiry, can be characterized in terms of the exercise of the ability to make good choices between goods and the virtues required both for overcoming and moving on from adversity and for giving pleasure, the exercise of power, and the acquisition of money a due, but no more than a due place in our lives.

On this conclusion too we may expect a significant measure of agreement, but it is important not to exaggerate its extent. Those impressed by

the arguments of Berlin, Hampshire, and Williams will have no difficulty in citing numerous real-life examples of disagreements, about the relative importance of certain goods in certain circumstances, about just what traits are to be included in the list of the virtues and about how they are to be characterized, about what lives are to be treated as exemplary. Such disagreements become practically as well as theoretically relevant when they have to be resolved by some individual or group in the course of their everyday decision making. How are they to be resolved? Only, as we have already noted, if the resolution is to be Aristotelian, through shared deliberation with family members or friends or coworkers or fellow citizens or as many of these as are relevant to this particular piece of decision making. But such resolution will only be possible if there is a significant degree of underlying agreement among all those involved on how goods are to be ordered and on the direction in which their community needs to move if its common and individual goods are to be achieved. The decisions that result will express a common mind as well as individual commitment.

To say this is to make it clear that, if this is a reply to Williams' objections to Aristotle, it is not one that Williams could have accepted or even entertained. For it is at odds with Williams' insistence on the first person character, a first person that is an 'I', not a 'we', of all practical deliberation that is an authentic expression of the agent. It is not after all so much the range and variety of goods between which individuals must choose, as with Berlin and Hampshire, that matters as the claim that each individual's choice among competing and conflicting goods must be authentically theirs. At this point the difference with Williams concerns the conditions that must be satisfied if rational decision making is to be possible. What I am asserting is that such decision making requires the existence of certain kinds of social relations, that individual agents are able to develop and exercise their capacity for rationality over any extended period of time only by engaging in mutual criticism with those others who share their practical concerns. So the third stage of enquiry into what the good life for human beings is concerns the kind of communities that we must inhabit, if we are to be rational. Here of course we can envisage a much wider range of possibilities than Aristotle could. Happily it is not only within the *polis* that human beings can flourish as rational animals. And it is not too difficult to rewrite Aristotle's arguments about the need for the *polis* (*Politics* I, 1253a1–39) in contemporary terms.

To do so, however, will involve confronting another of Williams' criticisms. To characterize humans as rational animals is to take an arbitrary and unfounded view of what is distinctive about human beings among

animal species. Quite as distinctive, so he argues, is their capacity for falling helplessly in love. Williams here may at first seem, surprisingly, to miss the point that impresses Aristotelians. There are certainly species of nonhuman animals, gorillas, dolphins, and wolves, for example, whose members on occasion act for reasons and make practical inferences. What none of them can do is twofold. Lacking the resources of human language, they cannot reflect upon and criticize their own reasoning and that of others. And they cannot raise questions about whether or not they have good reason to believe what they do and as they do and to desire what they do and as they do. But of this, of course, Williams was well aware. What, I take it, impressed him was the distinctive affective life of human beings, the capacity to be moved by a range of fears, excitements, hates, loves, and sympathies that cannot be experienced by gorillas, dolphins, or wolves, and he saw no reason to take these phenomena to be either more or less distinctive of human beings than their rational capacities. So why should we disagree with him? Begin with the issue of distinctiveness.

Species emerge by natural selection in particular types of environment. Whether or not a given species flourishes or fails to flourish in reproductive terms depends on its environment, except in the case of human agents who have developed unique abilities to change their environments, so that natural selection no longer operates as it did and does with other species. It is not that members of some other species do not change and change with their environments.<sup>21</sup> And it is not of course that natural selection no longer operates with human agents, but that gradually activities emerge which engage and engross, but which no longer confer reproductive advantage, either on individuals or on groups. Hence, the need for evolutionary biologists to explain the consequent features of human life – concern with large cardinal numbers or with the history of Persian miniature painting, say, or with winning pie eating contests – as spandrels, as activities incidental to natural selection. It is, however, the number and importance of such activities in human life that make human beings biologically distinctive. But to say what such activities have in common we have to go beyond biology.

The key moment in distinctively human development occurs when someone first makes use of their linguistic powers to pose the question 'What is the good of doing this or that, of making this or that happen or allowing this or that to happen?' and is understood as inviting from others

<sup>21</sup> For two views on this, see K. Laland, T. Uller, M. Feldman, K. Sterelny, G. B. Müller, A. Moczek et al. "Does Evolutionary Theory Need a Rethink?" *Nature* (October 8, 2014): 161–164.

or from himself some statement of reasons for and against any particular answer, reasons which can then be evaluated. From then on human projects, human responses to good and bad fortune, and human relationships were taken to be intelligible in terms of the good and the bad, the rationally justifiable and the rationally unjustifiable. So there came a time when our predecessors were able to ask 'Is it a good thing or a bad thing to fall helplessly in love?' and to consider such responses as 'That depends on whom or what you fall in love with' and 'A bad thing if it happens too often'. We are of course also able to ask similar questions about members of some nonhuman species. Is this change in ocean temperature good or bad for dolphins? Are these changes in the demand for ivory good or bad for elephants? But these are questions that dolphins and elephants themselves cannot ask or answer, let alone justify their answers.

My claim is, then, that human beings have distinguished themselves from other animal species by realizing possibilities that cannot be accounted for solely in evolutionary terms and that what they have realized is a determinate form of life, participation in which requires a grasp of and an ability to find application for the concept of a good, the concept of a reason, and a number of closely related concepts. Williams was right in taking some human affective capacities to be distinctively human. Part of what makes them distinctive, however, is the ways in which they can be educated and their exercise criticized. Attention to these might have suggested that this objection to Aristotle misses the mark. It also provides a starting point for responding to Williams' charge that Aristotle's teleological account of human agency became incredible with the scientific rejection of his overall teleological account of nature. Since, unlike Nussbaum, I agree with Williams that the presuppositions of Aristotle's account of agency commit him to at least some theses about teleological explanation in the natural world, I cannot answer him as Nussbaum does. Why then do I agree with Williams?

Aristotle insists from the outset that we can understand agency adequately only if we understand it from two perspectives, that of the agent and that of the external observer. Moreover these are not two independent perspectives. As agents, we need at various points to learn from external observers, while, as observers, we need to learn from agents. As observers we initially treat human agents as we do all other animal agents, identifying the ends to which characteristically and generally their activities are directed and in terms of which those activities have to be characterized, if they are to be understood. An injured or a diseased animal is one whose functioning is such that, although nothing in the environment prevents

them from functioning well, their activities fall short of achieving their characteristic ends. Injured cheetahs fail to hunt successfully. Young male dolphins, infected by disease, cease to engage in play. Notice that it is for the tasks of identifying and describing animal activity that teleology is indispensable. How that activity is to be explained remains at this point an open question.

As with nonhuman animals, so it is too with human agents. We observe the ends to which characteristically and generally their activities are directed. We note how with them too disease and injury prevent them from attaining their ends. We also note, still as external observers, two important differences from nonhuman animals, the length of time after weaning during which their young remain dependent on their parents and other elders and the amount and kind of education that they have to receive from those parents and other elders, if they are to function well as adults. Without that education or, if they have been badly educated, they will be unable to achieve their ends, since as agents they will not know how to rank order goods correctly and to identify their final end. But at this point we are inescapably aware that they are we, that as agents we are engaged, if we have been rightly educated, whether by ourselves or by others, in discovering what our end is, so that in our practice we may be directed toward its attainment. For, on Aristotle's view, human agents, as participants in the form of life that is distinctively human, have a final end and what it is is a matter of fact. They can only be understood, they can only understand themselves teleologically. It was Williams' recognition that this conception of teleological understanding is integral to Aristotle's morals and politics that furnished him with perhaps the most important of all his reasons for rejecting Aristotle. What then is to be said in defense of Aristotle's thesis?

Aristotle was deciding between rival answers to the question 'How is it best for me to act qua human being?' The contrast is with such questions as 'How is it best for me to act qua aunt or qua student or qua farmer or qua physician?' In these latter cases what it is to be a good aunt or student or farmer or physician, and whether it is good to be an aunt, student, farmer, or physician, may be relatively unproblematic given that we have a clear enough conception of the role and place of aunts, students, farmers, or physicians in the social order that we inhabit. In each role we are to aim at the ends of that role. Aunts aim at supplying what is needed for the well-being of their nieces and nephews that parents or other family members are unable or unwilling to supply, while students aim to complete the current stage of their education. The end of farming is to produce food

and to sustain land and farm animals, while the end of medical practice is to restore and maintain the health of patients. But how are we to integrate those various activities in which we engage in each of our roles, so that we act as it is best to act qua human being? What are we to aim at, what is our end, qua human being?

Here we have to revisit the arguments of the NeoAristotelian whom I imagined in Chapter 1, section 1.8, noting that these are questions about all our activities, including those activities in which we engage in our various roles. The final human end must be such that we are to aim at it in the course of aiming at the achievement of our other ends. It is at once clear that there are two obvious ways in which we may fail as human beings. We may on the one hand lead compartmentalized lives, failing to integrate our different roles, so that in effect we lead a number of different lives, something that it is all too easy to do in a culture such as our own. What compartmentalization is apt to obscure is the extent to which decisions in one part of our lives impact upon our other activities and relationships. How we allocate our time is a more accurate indicator of what we care about and how much than are our subjective feelings, and the more time that we expend in any one area of our lives the less time that there is for other areas. So it may be a very important fact about someone, even if quite unnoticed by that someone, that he never finds time to listen to Bach or never sits alone in silence. One alternative to living compartmentalized lives is to live somewhat haphazardly, to lead lives in which we recurrently allow activities in one area to disrupt or frustrate or defer activities in other areas. Such lives are themselves arguments for introducing order.

Suppose then that someone, recognizing the need to integrate their activities, but being fearful and cautious, adopts as a principle to act so as to minimize their exposure to situations that can get out of hand, that might take them into unfamiliar and unpredictable territory. To that principle there are two major objections. The first is that those who adopt it exclude from their lives in advance goods that it may at some later stage be important for them to achieve. The second is that to live by this principle is, although it may not look like it, to live as a hedonist. Why do I say this and what is wrong with being a hedonist? Hedonists act so as to ensure that, so far as possible, what they do and what happens to them gives pleasure and avoids pain. Our imagined fearful and cautious agent makes the avoidance of what pains him his overriding objective, so making the hedonist mistake of supposing that agents should take their appetites and aversions as given and choose their goods accordingly rather than working to transform their appetites and aversions, so that they may achieve goods which otherwise they will have to renounce. What pleases and pains us

depends on what kind of person we are, as Aristotle and Aquinas both stress, and what matters is to become someone open to achieving the goods of a good life. Whatever the final end of human activity may be, it cannot be the achievement of pleasure or the avoidance of pain. What else can it not be?

In putting the question in this negative way, I am following the example of Aquinas, whose name for the state in which someone who had achieved her or his final end qua human being would be was *beatitudo*, his translation of Aristotle's *eudaimonia*. At the beginning of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologiae* (Ia-IIae, qu. 2, art. 1-8), he proceeds negatively by showing what beatitude cannot consist in, at each stage providing grounds for his argument as to what it must consist in. So he argues that it cannot consist in the acquisition or possession of money, political honors, reputation, power, health, or pleasure, all of them goods in their due place, but none of them our final good. From his reasons for these and other rejections, he arrives at three conclusions. Whatever that good in attaining which we have completed our lives by arriving at our final end is, it cannot be a means to something else, since that something else would be that for the sake of which we engaged in it and so would have a better title to be our final end. Moreover, it cannot be a particular good of the same order as other particular goods, although greater and exceedingly greater than any of them, for, if so, it too would have its due place in our lives, presumably the greatest place in our lives, but it would not provide the measure of what the due place of each type of good and each particular good is in our lives, while any good that completes our lives must provide just such a measure.

The good that is our final end does not compete with other goods. We value other goods both for their own sake and for what they contribute to our lives as a whole, as a unity. The good that is our final end constitutes our lives as wholes, as unities. So in acting for the sake of achieving some particular good, we also act for the sake of achieving our final end, and it is this that, if we act rightly, gives our lives a directedness toward that end. It is for this reason – and here of course I am moving beyond (some Thomists would say away from) Aquinas – that our lives have the narrative structure that they have and that we can only make ourselves adequately intelligible in narrative terms. As throughout our lives we move toward our final end, we are each of us enacting a story that has, on Aristotle's view, a number of different possible types of ending. When I die, it seems at first from Aristotle's initial formulations that I may be either *eudaimōn*, yet not *makarios*, or *eudaimōn* and *makarios*, or not *eudaimōn* and therefore *athlios* (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1100b8–1101a8). For to be *eudaimōn* is to have

become an agent whose activity is in accordance with the best and most complete of the virtues in a complete life (1098a 16–18), while to be *makarios* is to enjoy the goods of good outcomes, of rewarded achievement and good fortune. (To be *athlios* is to be wretched, struggling, unhappy.) So what then of the possibility of an agent who is *eudaimōn*, yet not *makarios*? Aristotle in the end rules it out. Without the goods of achievement and good fortune, he concludes, one cannot be *eudaimōn*. Was Aristotle right?

What Aristotle excludes, but Aquinas does not, is the possibility that there are situations in which defeat in achieving particular finite goals, no matter how great, is not a mark of failure. Consider the common enough case of someone who has treated some finite and particular good as if its achievement were not just a very great good, but her or his final end. They care about the well-being of their child or spouse or friend, or they aspire to some extraordinary athletic or intellectual feat in such a way and to such an extent that, were that child, spouse, or friend to die or were they to fail to attain their athletic or intellectual goal, their life, so they believe, would no longer have point or purpose. They might as well be dead and there would be, they take it, no good reason for them not to commit suicide. It is Aquinas's contention that this is never true of anyone and that rational agents find themselves committed to believing that it is not true of themselves, insofar as they are reflectively aware of the directedness of their lives toward an end that cannot be identified with any finite and particular end.

What could such an end beyond all finite ends be? In our practical lives we learn how to characterize it as we move toward it, the final and supreme object of desire, through a series of denials. It is not this, not that, not that other. For anyone educated into the NeoPlatonic tradition, as Aquinas had been by his reading of PseudoDionysius, the obvious parallel is with how through the disciplines of the contemplative life we come to characterize God, the final and supreme object of devotion, in a similarly negative way. It therefore matters to Aquinas as a philosophical theorist whether he does or does not have appropriate grounds for affirming that God, characterized as He is in our practical and contemplative lives, exists. It is Aquinas's conviction that he does have such grounds. What *we* have to ask is whether or not Aquinas's philosophical theses on God's existence are able to withstand not only the objections that he entertained, but the strongest contemporary objections. But of crucial importance as that question is, it may distract us from giving due weight to Aquinas's central insight about the final end of human beings.

It may seem paradoxical, but is not, to express that insight by saying that on his view we complete and perfect our lives by allowing them to remain incomplete. A good life is one in which an agent, although continuing to rank order particular and finite goods, treats none of these goods as necessary for the completion of her or his life, so leaving her or himself open to a final good beyond all such goods, as good desirable beyond all such goods. Defective lives are those in which agents either mistakenly identify some particular finite good that they have achieved or will achieve as their final good or suppose that failure or defeat in achieving such goods is failure to achieve their final good. Does one have to be a theist to understand one's life in these terms? Of course not. Whether Aquinas is right about the presuppositions of such a life is one thing. What the character of such a life is is quite another. Note that on this view lives cut short by inopportune and untimely deaths are not thereby imperfect. What matters is what the agent was open to at the time of her or his death, not the perhaps great, but finite goods of which the agent was deprived by that death.

This discussion and defense of a Thomistic Aristotelian account of the human good began as a response to the criticisms of Berlin, Hampshire, and especially Williams. Would they, could they, have judged it adequate? Quite certainly not! Indeed the theistic elements in that account would have given all three sufficient reason for rejecting it quite apart from any other consideration. And this is a mark of how systematic the disagreements are between anyone who in their everyday practical activities and choices presupposes something close to a Thomistic Aristotelian account and someone whose presuppositions are closer to those of Berlin, Hampshire, or Williams. Consider now a further implication of the Thomistic Aristotelian account.

#### 4.12 Narratives

In evaluating a life what kind of unity are we ascribing to it? It is the unity of a narrative, often a complex narrative, of which the agent who enacts it is at once subject and author, or rather coauthor. What kind of a narrative it is and the ways in which we become aware of it are both best understood by considering what it is for each of us to be accountable. Accountability is one more distinctively human characteristic. For, unlike dolphins, gorillas, and wolves, each of us may at any time be asked to give an account of ourselves, to say just what it is that we did, are now doing, or plan to do, to make our actions intelligible by explaining what motives and reasons

we have or had for acting, and to justify our actions by showing that those reasons were sufficiently good reasons. Others with whom we interact need to identify just what we did, are doing, or will do and why we so act and take ourselves to be justified in so acting, if they are to be able to respond to us, and so such questions are recurrently put to us by such others. But, since how we respond will determine our future relationships to them, we need to be reflectively aware of our past, present, and proposed actions and of their explanation and justification. So these are questions that we pose to ourselves. What each of us draws upon in answering them is the narrative of each of our particular lives, so far as we are aware of it. Compare two examples.

I may be called to account for something that, allegedly or in fact, I did, a very long time ago. What matters is twofold: whether or not in fact I did it and why I should now be called to account for it by this particular individual or group. What do I owe to this particular individual or group by way of accountability for what I then did? This is a question that others may put to us or that we may put to ourselves, as some have recently had to do in Eastern Europe when accused of having, in the era of Soviet and proSoviet regimes, collaborated with the secret police. In reply they have had to tell the story of their lives at the relevant time, leaving out none of the relevant aspects. Or someone may have become something of an enigma to her or himself, puzzled perhaps as to how they could have done or thought or felt certain things that they did or thought or felt, or as to whether they now need to make amends to others or even to themselves for having been so ruthless and unforgiving or so careless and unreliable a person. Once again the only possible reply is by telling a story, a story that will provide an answer by being intelligently selective. In both cases what is selected from is the larger narrative of the storyteller's life. It matters of course that the story told is true, that the selection is not a work of art designed to conceal and obscure what the storyteller was and is. We are all of us, as we have learned both from Augustine and from psychoanalysis, too often in the grip of fantasies and so apt, even when we think ourselves truthful, to deceive ourselves first and then others. But it is not, as Sartre held, that the narrative structure of the story itself falsifies. There are no true stories, says Antoine Roquentin, the character who is Sartre's mouthpiece in *La Nausée*.<sup>22</sup> Living is one thing, telling stories another. When we tell a story, we begin as we do because we already have in mind the ending, the outcome. In life we never know the outcome in advance, and so there

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*, Paris: Gallimard, 1938, trans. Robert Baldick as *Nausea*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965, pp. 60–62.

are no such endings and no such beginnings. Things just happen. Hence Sartre's conclusion that there are no plots, no true stories. But this is a mistake. Why so?

The enacted narrative of our lives begins at conception. It finds its ending at the point at which we have achieved or failed to achieve our ends as rational agents, when we have or have not completed our lives appropriately. So the argument that Sartre is mistaken is as weak or as strong as the argument that our lives can be completed, that there is indeed a final human end, Aristotle's and Aquinas's contention that we have just rehearsed. This was of course something of which Sartre was well aware, responding silently to his Thomistic contemporaries. But it is of some importance that Aristotle's and Aquinas's argument is grounded in the practical experience and awareness of agents, the directedness of whose lives begins with their initial education into the virtues. Such agents know very well some of what Sartre would tell them, that they never know in advance the outcomes of their actions. They also know, however, even if at the beginning inchoately, what it would be for those outcomes to turn out well or badly, and in knowing this they have from their beginnings some sense of an ending and that they are enacting a narrative. To this the Sartre of *La Nausée* will respond that this is just not how things in fact are, and Antoine Roquentin shows us what it is to have a life lived without narrative illusions. To which the Thomistic Aristotelian response must be first that Roquentin is a splendid example of an intelligent agent who has never been educated into the virtues and so fails to understand his own life, and secondly that the narrative of Roquentin's doings and sufferings that Sartre provides has the interest that it has only because it depicts a certain kind of life as it actually is, that is, that it is a truthful story of a kind that would be impossible if what Roquentin is made to say about storytelling were true.

What traditionally gives significance to the story told in a novel, a play, or an epic poem is that something is at stake for one or more of the characters with regard to their relationship to their final end. Generally, of course, little or nothing is said explicitly about that relationship. The *Divina Commedia*, that great theological epic, is the obvious exception. What is immediately at stake is characteristically some good on the achievement of which so much turns for the characters that its loss will put the direction that they have tried to give to their lives in question.<sup>23</sup> But so it is implicitly in the vast majority of stories from Homer through authors as various as

<sup>23</sup> Here I am drawing on Francis Slade, "On the Ontological Priority of Ends and Its Relevance to the Narrative Arts," in *Beauty, Art, and the Polis*, ed. Alice Ramos, Washington, DC: American Maritain Association, 2004.

Euripides, Ovid, Shakespeare, Sterne, Flaubert, and Henry James, stories in which the qualities of mind, heart, and character of the protagonists are revealed through struggles and conflicts that issue in success or failure to achieve some end and sometimes also in the discovery that success and failure are quite other than they were originally taken to be. With the twentieth century new kinds of storyteller and story emerge, storytellers, such as Sartre, who take the concept of such goods and such ends to be a metaphysical illusion, and stories of characters who inhabit worlds constructed so as to put in question that concept. Francis Slade considers two contrasting examples, the screenplays of Quentin Tarantino and the novels and short stories of Kafka.

Tarantino's characters, so Slade points out, inhabit a fictional world in which ends, whether ultimate or subordinate, have been erased, so that there are only rival and conflicting desires and purposes directed toward achieving the satisfaction of those desires, among them the desires of some characters to give aesthetic form and grace to the exercise of their skills and the violence of their encounters. The outcomes of those encounters are artfully imposed by Tarantino so that we are presented with an aesthetically disturbing world which is not our world. Kafka, by contrast, shows us – in an even more aesthetically disturbing way – our world as we sometimes fear it to be, a world in which the possibility that we have ends and not just desires and desire serving purposes, the possibility that there is a point and purpose to our lives, is never quite foreclosed, but in which we cannot but continue in a protracted state of suspicion that at most “There is a goal, but no way; what we call way is only wavering.”<sup>24</sup> What Tarantino and Kafka as storytellers put in question is the possibility of there being any such thing as a directedness in human life toward goods on the achievement of which everything might turn for an agent. Is there a story to be told that goes one step further, portraying a world recognizable as our world, but devoid of goods and ends? It might seem that there could be no such story, since in it nothing of genuine significance could happen. But there is indeed such a story, one of the great novels of the twentieth century, unrecognized as such up till now only because written in Irish, a wonderfully impressive Irish whose translation presents unusual difficulties.

I refer to *Cré na Cille* by Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–70), published in 1949, made into a splendid film with English subtitles as *Graveyard Clay* (2007), and only recently translated into English.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Great Wall of China*, trans. W. and E. Muir, New York: Schocken Books, 1946.

<sup>25</sup> Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Cré na Cille*, Dublin: Sáirséal and Dill; trans. Alan Titley as *The Dirty Dust*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2015, and trans. Liam Mac Con Iomáire and Tim Robinson as *Graveyard Clay*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2016.

*Cré na Cille* is a novel of many voices, voices of the dead in a graveyard on Ireland's Western seaboard, speaking sometimes to each other, sometimes to themselves, expressing feelings and concerns that they brought with them to the grave, enmities, resentments, anxieties, pleasure in the misfortunes of others, obsessions, pretensions, wishes to puncture the pretensions of others. The dead are endlessly what they were when alive.

Caitriona Pháidin, Ó Cadhain's central character, nurses several grievances, against her still living sister, against her son's mother-in-law, another inhabitant of the graveyard, and against her son for having had her buried in a fifteen shilling plot rather than in a more expensive one pound plot. When from time to time the newly dead and buried bring news of events among the living, Caitriona anxiously enquires whether her son has as yet arranged for the green basalt headstone for her grave on which her heart is set. Like the dreadful Caitriona, the other characters are moved by what they care about, by what they cannot help caring about, mocking others for what *they* care about, not because they appeal to some standard with regard to what is genuinely worth caring about, what is genuinely a good, but because mocking is among the few things that they enjoy. So Caitriona's son's mother-in-law, Nóra Sheáinín, complains that the schoolmaster is consumed by his interest in gossip that his widow, immediately after his death, had taken up with Bileachaí an Phosta, the mailman, instead of, as an educated man should, cultivating his mind. So Caitriona in turn mocks Nora's pretensions to culture. It is not that in this world of the dead nothing happens. There is even an election with candidates from the one pound plots, the fifteen shilling plots, and the half guinea (ten shillings and sixpence) plots, during which the half guinea candidate advances a Marxist analysis of the class structure of the graveyard, parodying Ó Cadhain's own political views. But his, like all the rhetoric, is nothing but self-serving self-expression, talk leading to nothing but more talk, so that on the novel's last pages there are still voices competing with more voices, but no finality and no prospect of finality.

What Ó Cadhain portrays is a world marked as much by its absences as by its presences. There are desires and objects of desire, there are purposeful activities, but there are no goods that the characters might have good reason to desire, no ends to pursue that would give their activities point and purpose and their lives a directedness toward and beyond those ends. This is a horrifyingly deprived world in which the narratives of the characters' lives have lost their structure, so that their stories no longer have endings, while that this is how they endlessly are is the ending of the tale that Ó Cadhain tells. *Cré na Cille* is a work of great linguistic art, not only giving expression to his purposes as an artist, but vindicating those purposes just

because it is a novel in which the writer achieves the end of the novelist's art in exemplary fashion. The voices in the novel speak only through Ó Cadhain's book, but he in making those voices heard, speaks as they cannot speak, acts as they cannot act, achieving just that finality in completing and perfecting his art which is wholly absent from his characters' afterlives. The author's ends and the ends of his art are what is left out of his book.

That this is so might suggest that *Cré na Cille* can be read as a striking confirmation of the philosophical theses about how human activities and lives are structured that I have been advancing and defending. But to say this would be misleading. For it would suggest that such theses can be adequately spelled out and understood independently of and prior to telling those stories that provide examples of how and why those theses find application in our practical lives, and this would be a mistake. Stories and theses, stories and theses about rule-following and rule-breaking, about achieving and failing to achieve goods, have to be understood together or not at all. There is therefore of course a danger in treating stories as in themselves, without reference to rules or maxims, sources of practical guidance. We may, for example, too easily cast ourselves imaginatively in roles that provide pretexts for indulging desire for objects that we have no good reason to desire. Yet if we are to understand adequately why we do so, not just in general, but in particular instances, we will only be able to do so by both finding application for the relevant theses and discovering the true story to be told about those segments of our lives in which we became storytelling self-deceivers.

This, however, is a task whose nature and whose difficulty varies from culture to culture, since cultures themselves vary in their storytelling practices, as to who it is that tells stories to whom and as to what stories they tell. It is through listening to and reading stories of different kinds that children and young adults learn how to tell themselves stories in the course of answering such questions as 'What did I do today and what happened to me?' 'How did today's doings and happenings relate to those of past days, weeks, years?' and 'How do they point forward to tomorrow's doings and happenings?' So the young learn, or fail to learn, to imagine themselves as they were, as they are, and as they might become and the limits of their imagination set limits to their desires and to their practical reasoning. They learn to hope for the best that they can imagine, and they despair when they can imagine no good future. Because this is so, the storytelling resources of each culture are of great political and moral importance. Some cultures are rich in myth, others not. Some recapture their shared past more adequately

than others. Some develop theatrical and other literary genres that educate in storytelling, some genres that entertain by trivializing.

So it is that children and adults come to see themselves and episodes in their lives in comic, tragic, or even epic terms and to recognize differences between comedy and farce, tragedy and meaningless disaster, epic and romantic exaggeration masquerading as epic. So it is that they are rescued from illusion by satire, parody, and caricature. It is no accident that those philosophers who have thrown most light on the political and moral life, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Marx have each provided ways of understanding ourselves that require a retelling of the stories of our lives, the replacement of a less by a more adequate narrative. Yet it can happen, and it has happened in the culture of advanced modernity, that the practices of storytelling become such that they no longer provide resources for individuals struggling to narrate the story of their own lives, and this both because of what has happened to storytelling and what has happened to those lives. Begin with the shaping and structure of those lives.

I noted earlier that one large difference between every culture of advanced modernity and other cultures is the degree and nature of its compartmentalizations. What then happens to storytelling in such a culture? It too is assigned to various compartments in each of which which it functions very differently. So there are stories to be told to children, stories read in school and college literature classes as academic assignments, stories presented on television or cinema or theatre as entertainment, stories recounted in the news media for political significance or human interest ('Woman keeps zebra in back yard', 'Forty-seven die in fire of unknown origin'), all of them stories about others. What is too often missing is any conception of listening to stories and telling stories as activities of crucial importance to each of us in understanding ourselves and others, any sense of how much we need to learn first to listen and then to narrate.

Yet this is after all just one more aspect of the dominant culture that is inimical to those relationships that sustain and are sustained by the exercise of the virtues, a counterpart to other such aspects that we had already identified. The exploitative structures of both free market and state capitalism make it often difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve the goods of the workplace through excellent work. The political structures of modern states that exclude most citizens from participation in extended and informed deliberation on issues of crucial importance to their lives make it often difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve the goods of local community. The influence of Morality in normative and evaluative thinking makes it often difficult and sometimes impossible for the claims of



the virtues to be understood, let alone acknowledged in our common lives. So too the culture that entertains and distracts makes it often difficult and sometimes impossible to develop those imaginative powers that are of the first importance for living the life of the virtues. We therefore have to live *against* the cultural grain, just as we have to learn to act as economic, political, and moral antagonists of the dominant order. We can only learn how so to act, not from abstract theorizing, but in key part from the stories of those who in various very different modern social contexts have discovered what had to be done, if essential human goods were to be achieved, and what the virtues therefore required of them, so making themselves into critics and antagonists of the established order. I therefore need to proceed beyond my theoretical conclusions to give accounts of some exemplary lives. Before I can do this, I have to confront the objection that by so doing I am myself surrendering to illusion. I have already responded to the arguments against any narrative understanding of human life advanced by Sartre. But more powerful philosophical arguments tending to the same conclusion have been advanced more recently from within both the phenomenological and the analytic tradition.

#### 4.13 Continuing disagreements concerning narrative

Those from within the phenomenological tradition were the work of László Tengelyi in his *The Wild Region in Life-History*.<sup>26</sup> Tengelyi draws upon both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in constructing a view of the self which leads him to reject my account of narrative. Husserl had observed uncontroversially that there is that given in the present otherness of the other which is never appropriable by me, a thought developed in more striking and controversial terms by Levinas. Merleau-Ponty had moved beyond this thought of Husserl in another direction. In encountering the bodily other, we encounter what is "beyond the objective body as the sense of the painting is beyond the canvas,"<sup>27</sup> something that we cannot always reckon with in our own terms because it has a strangeness that has not yet been and sometimes cannot be culturally domesticated within our familiar forms. Reflecting on what he had learned from Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, Merleau-Ponty had gone on to write of a "wild region" in human life beyond all

<sup>26</sup> László Tengelyi, *The Wild Region in Life-History*, trans. G. Kállay with the author, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 167, quoted by Tengelyi, p. 104.

particular cultures, the region from which those cultures originate. Tengelyi follows Merleau-Ponty in speaking of what he calls the wild as that in our lived experience without which we could not live and think as we do, without which our lives would lack the meanings and forms that they have, but which itself remains beyond all culturally determinate forms. How does this bear upon his rejection of my understanding of lives as "enacted dramatic narratives" in *After Virtue* and elsewhere?

Tengelyi argues that "the ground of selfhood is to be sought not in the unity of a narrated life story, or in life as a complex of told stories, but in life as a totality of lived experiences,"<sup>28</sup> and that there is that in those experiences which cannot find expression in narrative. There are key moments in our lives, moments when something radically new begins, something with "ingredients that do not lend themselves to the retroactive constitution of such a sequence" in a narrative.<sup>29</sup> In the stories that we tell subsequently, these "recalcitrant shreds of sense" may be ignored, dismissed, or repressed, but they leave significant traces in our lives and may reemerge in striking ways. To understand life in narrative terms is to confer upon it a coherence that it does not possess and to disguise that in it which belongs to the wild.

Tengelyi is of course right in holding that there are in every life experiences whose significance we do not know how to spell out, let alone to reckon with, experiences that threaten the coherence of our lives. He is right too in stressing our tendency to disguise from ourselves our awareness of their significance and in pointing out that one way in which we do this is by telling stories that conceal their place in our lives. Yet none of this is incompatible with my central contention. For how we reckon or fail to reckon with such experiences is a central issue for all of us, and there is always a story to be told about it. We can acknowledge the incoherence and unintelligibility of this or that aspect of our lives in a coherent and intelligible narrative without disguising or misrepresenting the incoherence and unintelligibility. Indeed there is no other way of acknowledging them adequately.

A very different criticism of my use of the notion of narrative has been made by Galen Strawson in his essay "Against Narrativity,"<sup>30</sup> where his arguments are principally directed against positions taken by Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur—Ricoeur is also discussed by Tengelyi—and by the psychiatrist Oliver Sacks, and the psychologist Jerome Bruner, but where

<sup>28</sup> Tengelyi, *The Wild Region in Life-History*, p. xix. <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

<sup>30</sup> Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," in *The Self*, ed. Galen Strawson, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 63–86.

I am identified as "the founding figure in the modern Narrativity camp." This latter is a little misleading, since I was and am very much indebted to Taylor, Ricoeur, Sacks, and Bruner. Strawson rejects two theses which he takes it that some or all of us endorse. The first is what he calls the psychological Narrativity thesis, "that human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort, or at least as a collection of stories." The second is the ethical Narrativity thesis "that experiencing or conceiving one's life as a narrative is a good thing; a richly Narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life."<sup>31</sup>

Strawson's rejection of both theses is stated in terms of two distinctions. The first is between "one's experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as a human being taken as a whole, and one's experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as an inner mental entity or 'self' of some sort – I'll call this one's self-experience."<sup>32</sup> The second is between two forms of self-experience, the Diachronic in which one "figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" and the Episodic in which "one has little or no sense that the self that one is was there in the (further) past and will be there in the future." Those whose self-experience is or is mostly Episodic, for whom the self that they once were is not the self that they are now and for whom neither is the self that they may become – Henry James and Proust are among those cited as providing examples – "are likely to have no particular tendency to see their lives in Narrative terms."<sup>33</sup> Strawson counts himself among the latter and concludes that, as a generalization about human beings, the psychological thesis is false. For those for whom it does not hold, it makes no sense to evaluate their lives in narrative terms and in fact a life thought of and evaluated in this way is inferior to certain other kinds of life. By contrast "the truly happy-go-lucky, see-what-comes-along-lives are among the best there are, vivid, blessed, profound... a gift for friendship is shown in how one is in the present."<sup>34</sup> He therefore rejects among other versions of the narrative view my claim that to ask "What is the good for me?" is to ask how my life, understood as having the unity that is disclosed in its narrative, might best be brought to completion.<sup>35</sup>

The disagreements that Strawson and I have with each other's conception of the self are rooted in fundamental differences in the philosophy of mind on issues that require further philosophical attention – personal

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 63.    <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 64.    <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 65.    <sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 84–85.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 71–72.

identity, self-knowledge, intention – and these I cannot pursue here. However, Strawson's remarks on narrativity reveal some misunderstanding of my position. It is not at all my view that human beings most of the time *experience* their lives as narratives, something that would involve a remarkable and unfortunate degree of self-dramatization. But happily most of us are not such self-dramatizers. We generally become aware of the narrative structure of our lives infrequently and in either of two ways, when we reflect upon how to make ourselves intelligible to others by telling them the relevant parts of our story or when we have some particular reason to ask 'How has my life gone so far?' and 'How must I act if it is to go well in future?' It is in answering these sometimes harsh practical questions that the question 'What is the good for me?' with its narrative presuppositions is also answered. What occasions the asking of these questions is a need to make critical choices at points in our lives in which alternative futures open up, and here I once again have to reiterate what I said earlier.

For all of us, when we become adults or even before that, we have to decide on how to earn our living: Do I stay to work on the farm or become an apprentice carpenter or emigrate to another country? For some, the unexpected loss of a job in middle age or a life-threatening illness or the death of someone on whom we have depended gives reason to ask equally searching questions. For some, either the discovery of new possibilities, of what might be achieved by organizing a trade union branch or by learning to paint, may elicit them. It is in attempting to answer them that we draw upon our history, upon our knowledge of what we have hitherto done and been, of what we have learned about our capacities and our limitations, about the errors to which we are prone and the resources that we possess. Agents do of course vary a great deal in the way in which they pose and answer these questions. There are different modes of intelligent reflection, and for many how they reflect is as much a matter of what they do as of what they say, of what they leave unexpressed as of what they express. Someone, however, who on such occasions of crisis and choice failed to ask these questions, and to draw upon the narrative of her or his life in relevant ways, would be lacking in practical intelligence.

What Strawson takes to be at issue in asking whether and how far someone thinks of or experiences her or his life in narrative terms is therefore significantly different from what I take to be at issue. What then of Strawson's praise for "truly happy-go-lucky, see-what-comes-along-lives"? If Strawson were to justify that praise, he would have to give us examples of such lives spelled out in some detail, that is, he would have to provide us with narratives on which he could draw to respond to key objections to

his thesis. Even a life lived episodically has a history and can be evaluated as a life. About the kind of life that Strawson praises, it is to the point to remark that those who live them characteristically are able to do so only because others who are not leading happy-go-lucky lives are sustaining the relationships and institutions that make their lives possible. Families, schools, workplaces, clinics, theatres, and sports teams only thrive if there are not too many happy-go-lucky lives. So the questions arise: What are the happy-go-lucky able to say in explaining and justifying their lives, when they are called to account by those others? What has Strawson to say on their behalf?

I do not doubt that Tengelyi and Strawson will have telling replies to my responses to their responses to my theses about narratives. Here once again there is ongoing enquiry. But where narrative is concerned, we need not only more arguments, but also more narratives. For if it is true, as I have claimed, that we understand both the vicissitudes of our desires and the course and outcomes of our practical reasoning in narrative terms, then this is best demonstrated, not by philosophical arguments, necessary as those are, but by illuminating examples of narratives of the relevant kind, narratives that make the actions of particular agents intelligible and show them to be justified or unjustified.

## CHAPTER 5

*Four narratives*

## 5.1 Introductory

A single, if complex, theoretical conclusion emerged from the first four chapters of this essay. It is that agents do well only if and when they act to satisfy only those desires whose objects they have good reason to desire, that only agents who are sound and effective practical reasoners so act, that such agents must be disposed to act as the virtues require, and that such agents will be directed in their actions toward the achievement of their final end. This sounds like a complex platitude, until it is spelled out. But these are not four independent sets of conditions that agents must satisfy if they are to act rightly and well. Spell out any one of them adequately and in so doing you will also have to spell out the other three. Moreover, like all theoretical conclusions in politics and ethics, this one can be understood adequately only by attention to the detail of particular cases that in significant ways exemplify it, not imaginary examples, but real examples. Understanding such conclusions is inseparable from knowing how they find application. Yet such examples will be of agents who are, like the rest of us, not yet fully rational, who are still learning how to act rightly and well, and who therefore are more or less imperfect in all four respects. That they are so makes it possible for them on occasion to serve another purpose, that of exhibiting the relevance of the generalizations of theory to reflection by particular agents on the singularities of their own lives. And this is of peculiar interest when those agents are ones from whom we ourselves need to learn.

The four individuals whose stories I am going to recount, at least in part, were just such agents. Each had a singular history, yet one that throws light on other lives lived out in in very different circumstances. For each there is an adequate record of the relevant episodes in their history. All four are neither too close to us that our view of them is distorted by our own concerns, nor too distant that the relationship of their lives to ours is

problematic. All four led untypical lives, confronting issues that many of us never confront. But each by their choices throws light on the everyday choices of everyday modern life. There is, of course, a certain arbitrariness in my picking out these four, but my aim is no more than to illustrate the part that narratives of others play in our understanding of practice. So what I am presenting is too selective to be adequate as biography, and the focus of my attention is very different from that of most biographers. But I am of course deeply indebted to their various biographers, both for the facts of their lives and for their illuminating perspectives. I begin with Vasily Grossman, born in Berdichev in Ukraine in 1905, continue with Sandra Day O'Connor, born in El Paso, Texas, in 1930, and with C. L. R. James, born in Trinidad in 1901, and end with Denis Faul, born in Louth in Ireland in 1932.

### 5.2 Vasily Grossman

Berdichev had been a center of Jewish culture for centuries, home to notable rabbis and home too to an educated class of secularized Jews. Grossman's parents belonged to that class, spoke Russian, not Yiddish, and gave their son a secular upbringing. His father was a chemical engineer, his mother a teacher of French. At some early point his parents separated and from 1910 to 1912 his mother took him to live in Switzerland. Like his mother he became a fluent French speaker. He was not yet twelve years old when the October revolution occurred and only fifteen at the close of the Civil War. From 1923 until the end of 1929, Grossman was a student of chemistry at Moscow State University, a period in which the Soviet leadership struggled over issues of agricultural collectivization and industrialization. The political history of those struggles was also the history of Stalin's rise to supreme dictatorial power. Some aspects of that rise to power and of Stalin's subsequent exercise of that power are notable. The first is the exclusion of any dissenting voices not only from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, but from all the leadership positions in both party and state. To what was assent required? To every detail of Stalin's policies on industrialization and on the measures needed to remake Soviet farming, so that it served the goals of industrialization, and to every detail of Stalin's claim that by following those policies a socialist order would be constructed, so that the Soviet Union was in the vanguard of human progress. Secondly, the ruthless use of terror against Stalin's rivals extended into a wider system of purges and punishments, institutionalized

in the OGPU and the Gulag. But if we are impressed by this ruthlessness and by the scale of Stalin's crimes, as we certainly should be, we may fail to notice that Stalin's Russia could not have functioned as it did if it had been a society only of the terrified and of self-serving cynics. An immense number of Soviet citizens came to understand themselves and their everyday tasks, at least for the most part, just as Stalin intended them to understand them, among them the young Grossman. What did this entail? The claim made by the party leadership was that the path to future human flourishing was that taken by the Soviet Union, that human goods were to be ordered as the party ordered them. It was because and insofar as Soviet citizens assented to this, because and insofar as their practical reasoning conformed to the norms laid down by the party, that Stalin's Russia became to a remarkable extent Stalinist Russia.

Thirdly, because Stalin presented himself as the legitimate heir of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the rhetoric through which he and his apologists presented their theoretical stances, the policies that embodied those stances, and the effects on Soviet daily life of those policies had to employ the same terms by which Marx, Engels, and Lenin had defined their commitments. But because Stalinism was in crucial respects at odds with the Marxism of Lenin, let alone with that of Marx and Engels, its rhetoric functioned so as to conceal the gap between Soviet realities and any truthful Marxist account of them, such as that supplied by Trotsky. Hence, the need for recurrent and obsessive denunciations of Trotskyism. Hence also some of the peculiar problems that confronted Soviet writers. Writers had been assigned the task of shaping the Soviet imagination, so that their readers would come to understand themselves in Stalinist terms. "The production of souls is more important than the production of tanks," declared Stalin in 1932, proposing a toast to writers as "the engineers of human souls." Grossman was to become just such a writer.

During his studies he had decided that it was not his vocation to become a chemical engineer. Already married when he graduated – the marriage lasted only until 1932 – and with a daughter born in 1930, a daughter at first brought up by his mother, he took a series of jobs, in a soap factory, as an inspector of mines, as a teacher of chemistry in a medical school in the Donbass region, and in the Sacco and Vanzetti Factory in Moscow. But already, before he graduated, he had been publishing articles in magazines and newspapers and his reading and thinking now became a counterpart to his writing. In 1929 he had read Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, and the questions that Tolstoy asks about the relationship of death to everyday life

became Grossman's questions. They are posed in the short story that first made Grossman well known, "V gorode Berdichev" ("In the Town of Berdichev"), published in *Literaturnaya gazeta* in April 1934.

The setting for the story is Yatki, home of the poorest Jews in Berdichev, during the war between the Bolsheviks and the Poles. It has two heroines, the political commissar of a Red Army cavalry unit, whose pregnancy by a fellow soldier is too advanced for an abortion, and the Jewish wife and mother in whose home she gives birth. The political commissar is no longer the one who gives the orders, the one on whose skill and steadfastness others depend. She and her child are now dependent on the skills and steadfastness of the mother and the midwife. So how is she to be both good mother and good soldier? When her child is one week old, the Red Army unit has to move out of Berdichev, because the Poles are advancing, and she finds that she cannot refuse to go with them, even though it means abandoning her child. The Jewish wife and mother is at once dismayed and baffled: how could any mother act like this? Her husband sees and admires the political commissar's resoluteness. But neither has the last word. That is voiced in the crying of the child.

So Grossman leaves his readers with two unanswered questions. More generally, when they have to choose between goods of such very different kinds, how are they to do it? And, more particularly, when the choice is between the goods of children and family on the one hand and the good of the Soviet state on the other, what regrets and griefs must they put behind them? These were questions to which many of Grossman's readers must have had to give answers by choosing as they did in the course of their everyday lives, by the weight which they had given to various conflicting considerations in making those choices. What Grossman's story suggests is that those choices were sometimes deeply problematic, that some dilemmas of practical reasoning always remained unresolved. Yet it was a presupposition of Stalinist thinking that the good Soviet citizen's choices in ordering goods were unproblematic. What Stalin's leadership had provided was a way to think about oneself and one's choices as serving the goals set by that leadership, so that hard moral and metaphysical questions did not arise.

The year 1934 also saw the publication of Grossman's *Glyukauf*, a short novel about hardships endured by coal miners under the leadership of a Communist Party official who drives them to exhaustion and himself to death. It was published in the quarterly review, *Almanakh*, edited by Maxim Gorky, then the chief ornament of Stalin's cultural policies. Gorky's positive view of Grossman's writing was qualified by his criticism of what

he took to be Grossman's naturalism. The naturalist supposes that by telling the truth about how things are, about present reality, she or he tells the truth *simpliciter*. But what matters is not so much this as the truth about what things are becoming, about the reality that will be, but is not yet. So Gorky, enunciating the doctrine of Socialist Realism, complained that "in *Glyukauf* the material governs the author and not the other way round." Grossman should, on Gorky's view, have asked "Which truth am I confirming? Which truth do I wish to triumph?"<sup>1</sup> The truth about Soviet realities to be confirmed by artists in general and writers in particular is that affirmed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, that of the not yet. So Grossman still had to prove himself by showing that what he presented in imaginative terms gave expression to the Stalinist understanding of Russian social life. That he had done so became clear when in September 1937 he was admitted to membership in the Union of Soviet writers, which carried with it material rewards, including a large apartment in Moscow.

It would be a bad mistake to suppose that Grossman could only have achieved this by sacrificing his integrity. The genuine achievements of the Soviet regime and the worldview inculcated by Soviet journalism provided him and his contemporaries with a number of ways of justifying and excusing what were from any external point of view, among them of course that of Trotsky, moral crimes and irrationalities. Indeed this is how accusations of 'Trotskyism' in that period should be understood. To judge Soviet realities from any standpoint external to that defined by Stalin was in the Soviet Union in the 1930s to invite accusations of Trotskyism. As to what was involved in accusations of Trotskyism Grossman was well aware. In March 1933 his cousin, Nadya Almaz, who had worked in Moscow as assistant to the head of Profitern, the international Communist trade union organization, had been arrested by the OGPU and charged with Trotskyism, probably because she was in touch with Victor Serge, custodian of the ideals of 1917, who was arrested in 1933, sentenced to three years in exile, and then allowed to leave the Soviet Union. Nadya Almaz was similarly expelled from the Party and exiled for three years to Astrakhan. A few years later both would have been sent to the Gulag or executed. Grossman was among those questioned by an OGPU agent dealing with his

<sup>1</sup> Report of October 7, 1932, in the Gorky Archive, quoted in John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman*, New York: The Free Press, 1996, pp. 105-107. I am deeply indebted both to the Garrards' biography and to Frank Ellis' *Vasily Grossman: The Genesis and Evolution of a Russian Heretic*, Oxford/Providence, RI: Berg, 1994, for my understanding of the facts of Grossman's life.

cousin's case, so he could not have been unaware of the travesties that were being perpetrated. But what writers such as Grossman characteristically argued – how Grossman himself argued we do not know – was that great and rapid social change always involves some errors and injustices, that what matters overridingly is the end to which that change is directed, and that, if she or he contributes to that end by imaginative writing informed by the truth as she or he sees it, then she or he will contribute both to the achievement of that end and to overcoming error and injustice.

For some writers whose art and insight was such that they could only see Soviet realities as they in fact were, that argument was never compelling. And for every writer who for a time found that argument genuinely compelling there would come some moment at which it became impossible any longer both to tell the truth with imaginative power and integrity and to remain in good standing with the Writers' Union and indeed with Stalin, some moment of radical choice. In 1936 that moment had not yet arrived for Grossman. His practical reasoning proceeded from premises that were answers to questions of the form: 'By doing such and such will I develop my literary powers?' 'By doing such and such will I further my career as a writer?' 'By doing such and such will I further the good of my family members and friends?' 'By doing such and such will I contribute to achieving the goals of Soviet society, as the Party defines them?' and 'By doing such and such will I act as a good human being would act?' but questions posed not in these general and abstract terms, but in terms of the concrete detail of his own everyday life and circumstances. What always matters, both about individuals and about social orders, are the resources that they have within themselves for resolving dilemmas or for living with unresolved dilemmas, when considerations of these various kinds conflict. What Stalinist society imposed on those of its writers who over considerable periods of time attempted both to express their own imaginative vision and to secure the approval of the bureaucrats of the Writers' Union, the Party, and Stalin, was a double life, a life of oscillation, a life sometimes of dangerous risk taking, sometimes of self-serving silences, sometimes of self-serving speech. Such was Grossman's life.

How different from us, we may think. But in one respect this type of life is not unfamiliar. I noted earlier how in the contemporary social order our lives are compartmentalized, so that in one area of our lives, the workplace, say, we may allow ourselves to be governed by a very different set of norms from those to which we conform in another. Sometimes indeed those norms may be incompatible, but even in those cases we often move with remarkable ease between one area and another, without any loss of

sincerity. So it seems to have been with those writers who were at once creative and Stalinist, such as Grossman.

Some of his friends among former members of the literary and philosophical group *Pereval* began reading more widely in philosophy. That group had been forced to dissolve in 1932, because of the challenge that it had mounted to Gorky-style Socialist Realism. The key ideas of *Pereval* were those of Alexander Voronsky. Gorky and Voronsky had once been literary allies in founding the journal *Krasnaya Nov'* in 1921. Unlike Gorky, a latecomer to the revolution, Voronsky had been a Bolshevik since 1904 and had suffered imprisonment and exile before taking part in the insurrection in Odessa in 1917. Unlike Gorky, he followed Trotsky and Lunacharsky rather than Stalin and took his own distinctive stance in the literary conflicts of the 1920s. It was Voronsky's claim that the arts are independent sources of knowledge and that theorists have to be open to learning from artists. He advanced this claim as a Marxist, taking it that what the arts disclose about the ugliness and the beauty of human realities and what Marx's theory discloses complement and reinforce one another. "The artist does not invent the beautiful, he finds it in reality with his special sensitivity."<sup>2</sup>

The criteria by which the artist judges intuitively, the criteria that guide the artist in creating, are objective. "The beautiful is anything that gives us joy through its life, its abundance, unruliness, growth, and development."<sup>3</sup> The implication was clear. The party needs on occasion to learn from the artist and always to respect the artist's independence and integrity. Voronsky was expelled from the party in 1928, recanted, and was readmitted, later was expelled again, and was then executed in 1937. His achievement was to make it impossible for writers and other artists to ignore his challenge. They were at least for a time unable to define their commitments without reference to his as well as to Stalin's and Gorky's. So Voronsky played a key part both in defining the double life of the Soviet writer and in keeping writers aware of their duplicity. Grossman's duplicity was especially notable when in 1937, at the time of the trials of the old Bolshevik leaders, he signed a letter, published in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, denouncing the "Trotsky-Bukharin conspiracy" and calling for the death penalty for those on trial.

In February 1938 at the height of the Stalinist terror, Grossman's wife – his second wife – was arrested by the NKVD. Her former husband, Boris Guber, had been a member of *Pereval* and a number of *Perevaltsy* were either executed, as Guber was, or sent to the Gulag. Grossman's silence in

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings 1911–1936*, trans. and ed. F. S. Choate, Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 1998, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the case of his *Perevaltsy* friends contrasted with his courage in the case of his wife. He not only went to the NKVD offices to argue for her innocence and her release, but appealed by letter directly to Yezhov, the head of the NKVD, actions that could well have led to his own arrest. In fact he was successful and Olga Mikhailovna was set free in the late summer of 1938 so that they could resume their privileged lives as members of the Stalinist literary elite.

I spoke earlier of Grossman – and others – as leading a double life. It is now possible to characterize that duplicity a little further. For much of the time he lives, thinks, and acts *as if* a wholly convinced Stalinist, not someone on whom Stalinism has been imposed. Yet for some of the time he thinks, acts, and writes *as if* Voronsky's teaching were true, *as if* his own perceptive vision of how things are enabled him to recognize aspects of social reality that were deeply incompatible with Stalinism's claims. Something turns on how that 'as if' is to be understood. Was Grossman, even while apparently an undoubting Stalinist, troubled by aesthetically grounded doubts? Or did he move easily between his two standpoints, for most of the time an undoubting Stalinist, for some of the time something very different, yet able to fend off awareness of his duplicity?

Those leading such a double life argue to practical conclusions at this or that particular time from premises incompatible with those from which they argue at certain other times. The goods that provide them with their reasons for concluding as they do at this or that particular time are at other times dismissed as apparent, but not real goods, as desired, but not genuinely desirable. Such agents may be consistent, even inflexibly consistent rational agents in each part of their divided lives. It is in respect of those lives as a whole that they fail in practical rationality, something that they may disguise from themselves over long periods. But they are always liable to encounter situations in which the compartmentalization of their lives breaks down, moments when choices between incompatible goods become inescapable. Responses to such situations may be of at least three kinds.

They may simply choose that alternative, if there is one, that will allow them to continue as comfortably as possible in their duplicity, although no longer able to disguise their incoherence from themselves. From now on they are cynical hypocrites. Or they may instead choose between the alternatives in such a way as to render their lives coherent, although only in this particular area in which choice has become inescapable. Or they may, perhaps with difficulty, in pondering this particular choice, recognize the overall duplicity of their lives and by the choice that they make put an

end to their duplicity. There were Stalinists of all three kinds alongside the self-deceived Stalinist faithful. It was Grossman's fate to survive the years of terror in the late 1930s and to discover such moments of existential choice only during his war service from 1941 onwards and in the aftermath of the war.

During those years of terror, writers, like composers and painters, were peculiarly vulnerable because of the strong personal interest that Stalin took in their work. Akhmatova, the greatest Russian poet of the century, lived unpublished and in poverty under Stalin's regime, until Stalin approved the publication of *From Six Books* in a small edition in 1939. In 1938 her son had been sentenced to a five-year prison term and an arrest order for her was about to be issued when Stalin countermanded it. Pasternak, who had refused to accept the doctrines of Socialist Realism, to his very great credit refused to sign a letter from the Writers' Union demanding the death penalty for General Yakir and Marshal Tukhachevsky in 1937. He feared terrible consequences for himself and his family, but none ensued. When Stalin found Pasternak's name on a list of those to be executed, he ordered that it be taken off, saying, "Let that inhabitant of the clouds live!" Mandelstam, who had defied Stalin in 1934 by circulating a poem that ridiculed him, was by contrast imprisoned and died as a prisoner late in 1938. When Grossman's novel *Stepan Kol'chugin*, a portrayal of revolutionary life in Russia from 1905–1916, was widely praised and selected as a finalist for the Stalin Prize in 1940, Stalin intervened to veto any award to Grossman, calling his standpoint Menshevik.

What Grossman cared about during the 1930s, what gave him reasons for choosing and acting as he did, was at least fourfold. There were his personal ties: to his second wife and his stepson, to his mother who, though far from well-to-do, had brought up his daughter, to his daughter, to his father, to his cousin Nadya, who returned embittered from her exile in 1939, and to a variety of friends. Secondly, there was his genuine devotion to the Soviet project of building socialism, a devotion shared by the huge majority of Soviet citizens, even when sharply critical or cynical about this or that aspect of their lives. Thirdly, there was his commitment to his career as a writer and his deep reluctance to act so as to hinder that career. And, finally, there was his commitment to his art, the art of the short story writer and the novelist. What would happen if he had to choose between any one of these and one or more of the others? This he was to find out in stages.

One notable failure was in prudence. Soon after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Grossman must have realized that Berdichev, where his mother lived, would soon be occupied, and he had

the resources to move her and her mentally disabled niece to a place of safety. His wife had argued that there was no room for anyone else in their tiny Moscow apartment and, perhaps because of this, Grossman failed to act before the Germans occupied Berdichev. His mother, her niece, and all his relatives there suffered the common fate of the 30,000 Jews of Berdichev in September 1941. For this Grossman never forgave himself, and it was immediately after the occupation of Berdichev that he volunteered as a private soldier. What the military made of him was a journalist, a war correspondent for *Krasnaya zvezda*, *Red Star*, moving with frontline troops from battle to battle. It was to *Red Star* that millions of Russians, both civilian readers and the troops themselves, went for their daily war news, and Grossman was notable among those journalists who acquired avid readers. As both journalist and soldier, he consistently acted with great courage and was decorated both for his journalistic achievements and for his actions in combat.

Stalin had refused to believe that Hitler was about to invade the Soviet Union and had left his armed forces unprepared. His insistence on the control of the military by the party had further hindered the military response to the invasion. In the weeks that it took to overcome confusion and panic, before a unified and effective military leadership took charge and military and civilian resistance was mobilized in every sector, the *Wehrmacht* occupied much of the Ukraine and advanced steadily toward Moscow. What Grossman observed and reported in this first period was not only panic and confusion, but the emergence of a remarkable and shared will to resist. What he observed and reported as the war progressed through two epic battles, those of Stalingrad and Kursk, and hundreds of lesser engagements were example after example of the exercise of the virtues, of resourcefulness and judgment in the face of the unexpected, of courage and self-sacrifice as everyday virtues, of justice and friendship in conditions of great difficulty and hazard, and of these as exercised toward a common overriding end, while at the same time brutality, ruthlessness, self-serving avoidance of danger, and bureaucratic stupidity were also part of the fabric of life. Notably, he recorded the crimes of Soviet troops against German civilians in the closing phases of the war as faithfully as he had the crimes of German troops against Russian civilians. All this Grossman communicated without moralism through his reports from the frontline – some later published as *Stalingrad Sketches* – and in a novel, *The People are Immortal*, published in installments in *Red Star*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For Grossman's wartime writings, see *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945*, ed. and trans. A. Beevor and L. Vinogradova, London: Harvill Press, 2005.

It was as the Red Army recovered the lost territories that Grossman discovered the facts of the Holocaust, of the systematic mass murder of Jews, first when he returned to Berdichev, later when he reported on Treblinka. That report, "The Hell of Treblinka," first published in *Znamya* in 1944, was introduced as evidence at the Nuremberg trials. Stalin had allowed the creation of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1941 for propaganda purposes. Grossman had contributed to its Yiddish newspaper, *Einigkeit*, and in 1943, as a member of its Literary Commission, joined with Ilya Ehrenburg in compiling a record of the Holocaust on Russian territory, which they planned to publish as *The Black Book*. Grossman's Jewish identity now found expression in a deeply felt responsibility to all the Jewish dead. He later expressed a desire to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

It is one of the paradoxes of war that, at least for those fighting in wars that they take to be just, the disciplines and constraints of war can be felt as liberating. There is a shared overriding good to which all other goods have to be subordinated. The role and the responsibilities of each member of a unit are well defined. What each owes to others and can expect from others is generally not matter for debate. So, given the final goal and the set of constraints that are shared, individuals act as rational agents and do so in solidarity not only with those close to them in action, but with all those engaged in the same enterprise. It is when wars end and the tasks imposed by victory or defeat are confronted that some individuals find themselves with questions that, to their surprise, they are no longer sure how to answer. So it was in a number of countries in 1945. So it was notably in the Soviet Union and not only because the war had ended.

It was among Stalin's central concerns that the history of the war should be written so as to disguise some key realities of that war. Any memory of Stalin's own military bungling or of those episodes in the war which had put in question Stalin's actions or the role of the Party was to be erased, so far as possible, from Soviet consciousness. The policies which gave expression to Stalin's postwar concerns had an effect on Grossman in three ways. First, the doctrines of Socialist Realism in their crudest form were reasserted and imposed on writers, composers, and painters by A. A. Zhdanov, to whom, until his death in 1948, Stalin entrusted the implementation of his cultural policies. Here Grossman was not made an object of public humiliation, as were Akhmatova and Zoschenko, now denied publication altogether, but he had to negotiate his way carefully toward publication, exposed to the criticism of Stalinist hacks. Secondly, the publication of *The Black Book* was first delayed and then prohibited. All attempts to commemorate the fate of Soviet Jews were met by declarations that no group in Russia deserved distinctive commemoration, declarations that were a mask for Stalin's



anti-Semitism and the growing anti-Semitism of the Party. Members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested or killed and the Committee itself dissolved. Yiddish books were no longer published and the Writers' Union disowned its Yiddish writers. Jews increasingly became victims, most notably and finally in the prosecution of Jewish physicians for the so-called Doctors' Plot in the months before Stalin's death in March 1953. Had Stalin not died, Grossman too might have become such a victim, something that he no doubt had in mind when he allowed his name to be added to a letter calling for the severest punishment of the falsely accused physicians. In spite of his awareness of his Jewish identity, conformism to the Stalinist norms was a price for survival that he was still prepared to pay.

At stake was not only his life, but also the publication of his novel, *For a Just Cause*, at first titled *Stalingrad*, now retitled at the suggestion of Alexander Fadeyev, head of the Writers' Union. For a third area in which Grossman encountered the negative effects of Stalin's determination to control Soviet memory was as a chronicler of the battle of Stalingrad. Parts of his novel had already been published in *Novy Mir* in 1946, 1948, and 1949, when he submitted the novel as a whole for publication. Rewriting after rewriting was demanded. And rewriting after rewriting took place. At one point Grossman was telephoned by General Rodimtsev, who had commanded the 13th Guards at Stalingrad, the unit to which Grossman had been attached, to warn him that Mikhail Suslov had invited him to comment on the manuscript,<sup>5</sup> evidence that the scrutiny of Grossman's narrative was from the highest level. But when the final section of *For a Just Cause* was published, an initially favorable response was followed by denunciations. Fadeyev reversed himself and the consequences for Grossman appeared grim. But at this point Stalin died, and although attacks on Grossman continued – Fadeyev now accused him, among other things, of having underestimated the part played by the Party at Stalingrad and of identifying with the anti-Marxist views of two of his characters – Grossman was able to continue with his career.

How then should *For a Just Cause* in its final version be read? Both Russian and Western readers have been divided in their verdicts, some dismissing it as no more than a conventional Soviet novel, some seeing in it an anticipation of the radical critique of Soviet society delivered in *Life and Fate*. Who is right? The answer is that both are right in some measure, that the novel, like Grossman himself up to this point, is ambiguous. Grossman had been and was both a conformist and a rebel,

<sup>5</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, p. 223.

oscillating and compromising. But as he began to write *Life and Fate*, he disambiguated both his work and himself. I do not mean by this that he now deliberately set himself at odds with the regime – far from it. For one thing the regime changed after Stalin's death, from a brief period of collective leadership to Khrushchev's ascendancy, marked dramatically by his 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, to the rehabilitations and releases of many thousands from the Gulag and the resultant hopes for cultural openness, to the reaction against Khrushchev in the Party leadership and the death of those hopes. So too in the Writers' Union there was corresponding change, marked dramatically at the outset by Fadeyev's apology for the wrongs that he had done to other writers, including Grossman, and by subsequent reflections of the changing attitudes of the Party leadership. Through all this Grossman continued to live and work in a way that deferred to the limitations imposed by the regime, except, from now on, in one crucial respect.

He had now committed himself unconditionally to writing a novel about the war that would be truthful from beginning to end. What then is it for an historical novelist to be truthful? It is first of all to be careful that her or his narrative is not merely consistent with, but informed by the best historical knowledge available as to how things were at the relevant times and places. It is, secondly, to be imaginatively faithful in communicating how things were variously seen and felt by those inhabiting that particular past, so that characters who are fictions, who are imagined, enable the reader to understand what it would have been to be just such an actual inhabitant of that past. It is, thirdly, to avoid sentimentality, to refuse to allow irrelevant feeling to romanticize or to vulgarize or to domesticate the past. Such novels give expression both to the feelings of the characters portrayed and to the novelist's own feelings. Those feelings cannot but embody or presuppose judgments about what it is most important to care about and why it is important so to care. Given these requirements, the truthful historical novelist will always do more than merely describe, or rather her or his descriptions will be such that, once they have been grasped, there is no further task of evaluation. His descriptions are evaluations. The realism of the truthful historical novelist is more and other than naturalism.

In saying this, I am of course so far concurring with the proponents of socialist realism. Writing in 1955, Lukács argued that what the naturalist lacks is a sense of perspective. It is the perspective of the writer that determines "the course and content" of her or his narrative, "the direction in which characters develop, the possibilities that are realized or left

unrealized."<sup>6</sup> What Lukács did not say and perhaps could not have said is that such a perspective requires commitment to an evaluative standpoint, an ability to distinguish not only the good and the better from the bad and the worse, but also the various kinds and degrees of badness, deceit, and self-deceit, incompetence and thoughtlessness, deliberate evil and weakness in collaborating with evil, and the masks which each of these on occasion wears. For Lukács had in his time carefully averted his eyes from a great many evils. Grossman no longer averted his eyes.

So what is the relevance of all this to his practical reasoning? Grossman could not be truthful in his novel without becoming truthful about the narrative of his own life. Too many episodes in that life coincided with episodes in his novel. What the novel put on record was how he had learned to order goods in particular situations during his war service, something learned often enough from failures and mistakes. He had learned what he had good reason to desire and to do, and this knowledge informed his choices and his activities during the years when he was writing his novel. His practical arguments and decisions as a writer reproduce and reiterate the practical arguments and decisions of those from whom he had learned most as journalist and soldier. So all else became subordinated to a single aim. If and insofar as he now compromises with the regime, it is no longer because he is a divided self, but because he has accepted one overriding responsibility, that of completing his novel in the service of the good of truthfulness.

I have spoken of Grossman's novel as an historical novel and such it was and is. But it could not escape also being a novel about the Soviet present. For in spite of their repudiation of Stalin, the leadership of the USSR legitimated itself by appeal to an often fictitious history of how things had developed after Lenin's death and of the Party's role throughout. So although the regime was anxious not to appear repressive, there were strongly enforced limits to cultural openness. It became part of Soviet academic and literary culture to know how far one could go, not just in respect of what was said, but with regard to those to whom one spoke or within whose hearing one spoke. The smuggling of the text of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* out of Russia, its publication in Italy, its translations, and the Nobel Prize that was awarded to Pasternak both alarmed and outraged the regime's ideological caretakers. *Life and Fate* was well designed to alarm them even more. Why so?

<sup>6</sup> Georg Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism," in *Realism in Our Time*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964, trans. J. Mander and N. Mander from *Probleme der Realismus*, Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1955, and reprinted in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. A. Kadarkay, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 200 and 192.

First and most obviously because it catalogues fully the crimes and defects of the Soviet regime, the monstrous mass murders and cruelties of Stalinism, the dishonesties, indeed the bureaucratization of dishonesty, the crippling of the Red Army by Stalin's purge of the officer corps, the ineptitude of Stalin and of the Party in the first months of the war, the viciousness of Russian and especially Ukrainian anti-Semitism, the viciousness of Russian and especially Ukrainian collaboration with the Germans. Nothing is omitted, and all these evils are presented in memorably vivid terms and through telling examples. Grossman goes very much further than Khrushchev had done. It might therefore seem that *Life and Fate* is a straightforwardly anti-Soviet novel. But to read it as such would also be to make a serious mistake. This was not what Grossman intended and indeed this is not how the authorities read his novel. Grossman had looked forward to its publication and was surprised and disappointed by the response of the regime. So what did elicit that response?

What the authorities could not allow was the publication of *Life and Fate* at that particular time or in any future foreseeable by them. For while Khrushchev's revisionism had unleashed a new kind of questioning and an openness to rethinking a wide range of social and cultural issues, those in authority were at best ambivalent about this, recognizing some measure of questioning as inevitable and even welcome, but only insofar as it remained under their control and within the increasingly narrow limits that they imposed. *Life and Fate* by contrast invited its readers to engage in open and radical questioning of the whole Soviet enterprise. It did not and does not prescribe any particular set of answers – pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet – to its questions and it leaves open the possibility of a newly critical form of Soviet life and thought still inspired by and directed toward some version of the goals of the October revolution. But what *Life and Fate* would have undermined was anything close to the official Khrushchevite version of Soviet life and Soviet history. Its remarkable imaginative power was therefore an immediate danger to the regime.

Critics have compared its overall scope and ambition to Tolstoy's in *War and Peace* and Grossman's art in portraying character to Chekhov's. But the readers whom he addressed were very different from Tolstoy's or Chekhov's, scarred by experiences unknown to their readers, and invited by Grossman to see themselves in his characters while asking his, Grossman's, questions. The novel begins in a Nazi concentration camp, where Russian prisoners of war are held alongside political prisoners and common criminals. That camp, where things are so contrived by the SS that it is the prisoners themselves who administer the camp and cooperate in sustaining the evil, is

an image of the power of evil. When, later on, Liss, the camp commandant, argues compellingly to the still faithful old Bolshevik, Mostovskoy, who had been captured at Stalingrad, that Stalin's Russia is the mirror image of Hitler's Germany, that each values what the other values, the case that has to be answered has been made. But Mostovskoy also has to respond to the arguments of other Russian prisoners, of Chernetsov, the former Menshevik, and of Ikonnikov, the disillusioned Tolstoyan, whose pursuit of the questions "What is 'good'? 'Good' for whom? Is there a common good – the same for all . . . ? Or is my good your evil?" had led him to dismiss all philosophical and religious answers, while discovering that when evil is defeated it can only be by "the powerlessness of kindness, of senseless kindness."<sup>7</sup>

*Life and Fate* is not a work of philosophy, of abstraction. The reader moves through many different kinds of scene, responds to many different kinds of character, in the street by street fighting of Stalingrad, in the discussions of staff officers behind the lines, in the theoretical and experimental enquiries of physicists, in the political intrigues of Soviet science, in a discussion of the merits of Chekhov, in love affairs that go well and love affairs that go badly, in police interrogations that go badly and walks in the countryside that go well, in jokes and sneers and memories and griefs and deaths. Remember that the reader is to engage in questioning, not to assent to conclusions, but some conclusions are inescapable. "Let's begin with respect, compassion and love for the individual," says the mathematician, Sokolov, in the course of his praise of Chekhov.

Alexandra Vladimirovna, whom we first meet early in Part One, we last encounter nearly eight hundred pages later (in the English translation), as an old woman "wondering why the future of those she loved was so obscure and the past so full of mistakes, not realizing that this very obscurity and unhappiness concealed a strange hope and clarity, not realizing that in the depths of her soul she already knew the meaning of both her own life and the lives of her nearest and dearest."<sup>8</sup> What she already knew was that it is in living and dying as human beings that we achieve an "eternal and bitter victory" over the destructive forces of history. But what, then, are the qualities that enable us to live and die as human beings? They are certainly not just "respect, compassion and love for the individual." For one thing it matters enormously who won the battle of Stalingrad. "Stalingrad was to determine future social systems and philosophies of history." It matters

<sup>7</sup> Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. Robert Chandler, New York: New York Review Books, 2006, Part One, 1–4, 67, Part Two, 14–15.

<sup>8</sup> Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. Chandler, Part Three, 60.

too how the battle was won and that the story should be told truthfully. So the virtues of the soldier's life and the virtues of the writer's life must be among those qualities. But, given this, what then is the Russian reader to make of the social system and the philosophy of history that had in fact resulted from Stalingrad eighteen years later?

Grossman had already published extracts from *Life and Fate*, when he submitted it for publication to the editor of *Znamya* – he already had a contract with *Znamya* – in October, 1960. In January, 1961, he finally learned not only that it had been rejected, but that the editorial board had unanimously characterized it as "anti-Soviet." In February three KGB officers came to Grossman's apartment with a warrant authorizing them to seize every copy of his novel, together with rough drafts, typewriters, and carbons. Grossman himself was left at liberty. He appealed first to the Writers' Union and then to Khrushchev himself. It is a mark of the importance that the ideological guardians of the Soviet Union attached to Grossman's novel that he was summoned to meet with Mikhail Suslov, member of the Politburo and soon to become, after Khrushchev's fall in 1964, Second Secretary of the Communist Party. Suslov, admitting that he had not read the book, but only reports of it, told Grossman that publication of his book would do only serious harm to the Soviet state and that it must go unpublished.<sup>9</sup> Grossman was devastated and remained deeply unhappy until his death from cancer in 1964. He was not to know that a copy left with a friend would much later be smuggled out of Russia and later still be published in Switzerland.

This unhappiness did not prevent him from continuing to write. In late 1961 he visited Armenia and left a lively record of his visit – and of reflections on himself as a visitor – in *I Wish you Well*, to be published only after his death and then in a version in which what he had had to say about Soviet anti-Semitism had been deleted. But his greatest achievement was to continue working on his final novel, *Everything Flows*, begun as long ago as 1955 and unfinished at Grossman's death.<sup>10</sup> It is the story of the return to Soviet society of Ivan Grigoryevich after thirty years in the Gulag and of his reckoning with both the past and the present. He encounters the informer responsible for his own imprisonment and, in a play within the novel, four informers of different types tell their stories. Grigoryevich's landlady turned

<sup>9</sup> For Grossman's notes of the conversation, see Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, pp. 357–360.

<sup>10</sup> Vasily Grossman, *Everything Flows*, trans. R. Chandler and E. Chandler with A. Aslanyan, New York: New York Review Books, 2009.

lover confesses to her part in inflicting deadly famine on her Ukrainian neighbors. But it is not only a novel of confessions, but also of extended reflections, reflections on Stalin, on Lenin, and on their relationship to the prerevolutionary Russian past. Confessions and reflections serve a single unifying purpose, that of presenting an unqualifiedly negative verdict on Soviet society. *Everything Flows* is the straightforwardly antiSoviet novel that Suslov had supposed *Life and Fate* to be. What then is its central thesis?

That Stalin was indeed Lenin's true heir, that Stalin gave expression to "what was most essential in Lenin,"<sup>11</sup> and that Lenin was the true heir of a Russian tradition, exemplified by Peter the Great, in which "Russian progress and Russian slavery were shackled together."<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century the emancipation of the serfs and the struggles of revolutionary thinkers had opened up the possibility of freedom, of progress without slavery. But that possibility was foreclosed in 1917. It was not that Lenin willed the continuation of Russian slavery.<sup>13</sup> It is, indeed, tragic that a man who so sincerely loved Tolstoy and Beethoven should have furthered a new enslavement of the peasants and workers.<sup>14</sup> However, the reimposition of slavery to the state was the inevitable result of his love of power and his "frenzied, unyielding strength of will."<sup>14</sup> That state still lives. The state founded by Lenin and constructed by Stalin has now entered upon a third stage. So in these last years Grossman finally avows himself an enemy of the regime, finally becomes what Suslov had taken him to be, but to an extent unimagined even by Suslov.

The contrast with *Life and Fate* is important. There Grossman had put in question all philosophies of history. Here he advances his own philosophy of Russian history. There he invites his readers to question. Here he invites their assent. There nothing turns on his own philosophical commitments. Here a great deal of his argument invokes a never spelled out conception of freedom, one that seems closely akin to Isaiah Berlin's conception of negative liberty. The theses that he now advances require a great deal more argument than he supplies. Indeed, he nowhere recognizes adequately that there is a case to be made against him. (For that case see, for example, the first-hand testimony of Victor Serge, Grossman's cousin Nadya's alleged coconspirator, who agreed that Bolshevism had Stalinist tendencies from the beginning, but also insisted that it could have developed very differently, that there was no inevitability in the move from

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.    <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.    <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.    <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Lenin to Stalin.<sup>15</sup> So his rhetorically powerful, but argumentatively weak book expresses his final stance. Yet it is important to remember that he was already writing *Everything Flows* while he was writing *Life and Fate*, and, insofar as they express very different attitudes, they express once again a divided self. What, then, are we to say in conclusion about Grossman as a practical reasoner?

I have said almost nothing about the fabric of his everyday life both before and after the war, his relationships with his wives, his daughter, other family members, his friends – and he had some very good friends – and his collaborators. And I have said nothing at all about the structure of his everyday life as a writer, of the routines that governed his day, his week, his month. For Grossman, as for everyone else, most of his practical reasoning would have concerned the ways in which he lived out those routines and sustained or failed to sustain those relationships. And for Grossman, as for everyone else, others would have formed fixed expectations about his actions and his reactions and formed beliefs about what it was that he cared for. It is, however, when everyday routines are interrupted and familial and other relationships disturbed, especially by unexpected events, that individuals have to reflect and to identify what they take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, so that they discover, perhaps for the first time, to what course of action they are committed by their rank ordering of goods, and then have to decide whether that rank ordering stands in need of revision. It is on such occasions that an agent's practical reasoning becomes evident and open to evaluation by that agent or by others. Some very different occasions or sets of occasions were crucial in determining the course of Grossman's life.

The first were all those episodes in which Grossman was invited to and agreed to endorse and collaborate with the agencies of the Stalinist state, beginning with his interrogation by an OGPU agent after his cousin's arrest in 1933, continuing with his call, as a member of the Writer's Union, for the infliction of the death penalty on Bukharin and others in the monstrous show trial of 1938, and still continuing in 1953 when he once again endorsed a call for the infliction of the death penalty, this time on the physicians accused in the so-called Doctors' Plot. What motivated Grossman? Doubtless to some extent fear of the consequences of acting otherwise. But for most of his life at least, it also mattered to him that he

<sup>15</sup> See Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. P. Sedgwick with G. Paizis, New York: New York Review of Books Classics, 2012. See also Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, trans. B. Pearce, London: Jonathan Cape, 1975.

should act as a good Soviet citizen, and he believed that the goods which he chiefly valued, excellence in his writing and success as a writer, were goods recognized by and sustained by the Soviet state. Hence his acceptance of the tasks of rewriting so as to achieve publication, and hence his apparent lack of any concern for the treatment of Akhmatova and Pasternak. He structures his life as on the one hand his career requires, and on the other as the Stalinist state requires and, like millions of others, he finds no good reason to do otherwise. But this necessarily involved him, like them, in not raising certain questions, in closing their minds, so far as possible, to certain dreadful possibilities. And this necessarily involved him, like them, in not caring too much about the truth, in not letting a concern for the truth interfere with his life.

This is the stance from which Grossman begins as a practical reasoner. We all of us, whatever the time and place that we inhabit, begin as practical reasoners from some received view of things into which we have been initiated and educated, adopt some stance that provides us with a starting point. What differentiates us is whether or not and how we move forward from it. June 22 and July 7, 1941, were dates that marked a first radical change in Grossman. Those are the dates on which Hitler's Germany invaded Russia and the 11th Panzer Division reached Berdichev, making it impossible for Grossman to rescue his mother. What he then recognized was the relative insignificance of the reasons that he had had for not moving his mother and his niece to Moscow. It was not that they carried no weight as reasons. Like the vast majority of Muscovites, his living space was small and cramped, there was little privacy, his wife was understandably unwilling to have things made worse. But his failure to respond immediately to the German threat had fatal consequences, and he at once understood it as a failure in his responsibility for his mother and his family, a responsibility which became in time a responsibility to all those Jewish dead at the hands of the Nazis and then to all those Jews who had suffered as a consequence of anti-Semitism, whether, German or Russian, Polish or Ukrainian. This commitment became so central and so consistent that his lapses from it during the hysteria before Stalin's death can only be understood as expressions of a fear that he and his could not otherwise survive, a fear that was fully justified. So from then on Grossman was committed to discharging his responsibility to the Jewish dead as soon as possible, for acting on the reasons that he already had for providing a truthful account of the war.

I spoke earlier of Grossman as having disambiguated his work and himself as he began to write *Life and Fate*. But this disambiguation began

earlier with those experiences of war that were seminal for the later writing of the novel. It was in the war that he had discovered what it was to live a life with an overriding goal, to which all else had to be subordinated, that of victory. But of victory over what enemy? Much Soviet wartime rhetoric, that of Ilya Ehrenburg, for example, took the enemy to be Germany and the Germans. But increasingly the enemy was identified as National Socialism. What Grossman came to understand was that the enemy had indeed been National Socialism, but National Socialism as one of the forms taken by human evil and that truthfulness about what it is that you are against, if evil in some of its various forms is what you are against, is a condition of discovering what it is that you are for. So the achievement of truthfulness became Grossman's overriding goal, providing major premises for his practical reasoning. The obstacles to the achievement of truthfulness in the years in which he was writing *Life and Fate* were considerable.

The repudiation of Stalin and Stalinism by Khrushchev and his colleagues had been, as we already noted, only partial. And it took some time for Soviet thinkers and writers, let alone for ordinary citizens, to find out how the line between what it was now permissible to say and what remained impermissible was now drawn. The young philosopher Ewald Ilyenkov had published his dissertation on the abstract and the concrete in Marx's *Capital* in 1956, a dissertation whose originality and insight had earned him a well-deserved reputation. But when he and a colleague questioned Stalin's conception of dialectical materialism, they at once lost their jobs at Moscow State University. This did not mean an end to their academic careers. It, like other incidents of the same kind, was sufficient as a warning to their colleagues, who learned what could be said to whom and when, what truths might be told, what truths must be told, and what truths were never to be told.

Someone may remark that this is something that children learn in all societies, and this is true. What distinguished Khrushchevite and post-Khrushchevite Russia from, say, California or Sweden either then or now is that conformity in respect of the norms of truth-telling and lying was politically enforced, that one's and one's family's livelihood was at stake, and that enforcing as well as observing such conformity was required. So dissembling became a widely valued quality and unconditional regard for truthfulness dangerous. But this led to other moral deformations. Because successful dissembling was rewarded, those who were prepared to dissemble on behalf of others – their superiors in the workplace, those who allocated housing and other benefits, those who controlled the outcomes of bureaucratic processes – looked for rewards from those others. So in many

areas of Soviet life patronage, corruption, and cynicism, those marks of the later Brezhnev era, increasingly flourished alongside continuing Soviet patriotism and devotion to ideals.

Grossman's concern for truthfulness was far from unique among Soviet citizens. But his vocation as a writer, especially a writer with a well-established reputation, gave it a peculiar importance. His aim was no less than to elicit from as wide a range of readers as possible the kind of questioning, about their own forms of social life, about how the virtues and the vices, including the virtue of truthfulness, flourish or fail to flourish, that can be satisfied by nothing less than the truth. Was this a task in which he could have succeeded? The answer is clearly 'No', and this for two very different kinds of reason. The political condition of Soviet society in the 1960s made it certain that Grossman would be defeated. Yet, had that condition been very different, Grossman would still have been unlikely to succeed, except in a limited way. For the condition of life in every modern society is inimical to the kind of ruthlessly truthful self-questioning that Grossman attempted to elicit. So his task was one that could not have been completed. Yet it was a task that completed Grossman's own life.

I do not mean by this that Grossman understood his life to have been thus completed. He died a dissatisfied and unhappy man. Nonetheless, what was crucial was his now unwavering commitment to a task that gave point and purpose to everything in his life that had, after so many vicissitudes and uncertainties, issued in that commitment. It was insofar as his practical reasoning directed his actions toward the ends mandated by his task that he showed himself a rational agent. It was the pursuit of those ends that gave finality to his life, so making it unhappy in the modern sense, but in fact *eudaimōn*.

### 5.3 Sandra Day O'Connor

Sandra Day O'Connor's judicial argument and decision making will provide most of the subject matter for my account of her as a practical reasoner. But my concern with them will be very different from that of a legal theorist. For I am concerned to ask what patterns of practical reasoning were exemplified in her choices to think and act as she did in arriving at her decisions on the United States Supreme Court, what it was about her as a rational agent that made her the judge that she was. I need therefore to begin by remarking on two of her notable characteristics as a rational agent. The first is that in at least some contexts the goods that she was able to achieve as a judge were placed lower in her rank ordering of the goods that

she set herself to achieve than some others. I refer especially to her decision to retire from the Supreme Court in 2006 at the age of seventy-five. This was something that she had planned well in advance, in order that she and her husband could resume a shared life in which outdoors activities would once again have a central place. As it happened, soon after her retirement her husband's sad affliction by Alzheimer's made him instead the object of her devoted care. What both intention and action confirmed was that the goods of family and married life had always been assigned what she took to be their due place, and sometimes an overriding place, in her decision making. Secondly, as everyone who has written about her has emphasized, certain traits of character have persisted throughout her life. And she had early on developed a set of skills which she has recurrently put to good use.

O'Connor's childhood on a cattle ranch made her at once self-reliant, cooperative, and tough-minded, someone who faced with a well-defined problem would set about solving it efficiently. She had the support of an affectionate family and was brought up as an Episcopalian, although often attending a local Methodist church. Her Episcopalian commitments seem to have been unwavering throughout her life. She came at an early age to care about becoming excellent in her activities, something evident later in her golf and her bridge as well as in her practice of law. She has a first-rate mind and her Stanford degrees in economics and law gave her an unusual ability to confront what to others might seem large and intractable issues as well-defined problems. She had a gift, when unable to pursue some goal, of finding a way to move forward, so that in the longer run her further goals were achieved. Unable to find any position with a law firm when she graduated, because of entrenched prejudice against hiring women, she learned the trade of a deputy county attorney in San Mateo County, Arizona, and then, after the birth of her first child, joined with another young lawyer in founding a law practice. Unable to continue with that law practice, if she was to bring up her children as she wanted to, she undertook volunteer work with civic organizations, which led in time to her becoming in turn president of the Junior League of Phoenix, a precinct worker for the Republican Party, a state assistant attorney general, a member of and then the majority leader of the Arizona State Senate, and finally a judge, first on the Maricopa County Superior Court and then on the Arizona Court of Appeals. The combination of patience, intelligence, a respect for others, and a certain quiet, but sometimes abrasive relentlessness in the advancement of her legal career and in her life in general is notable. She has more than most wanted what she has had good reason to want and has acted as she had good reason to act, if she were to get what she wanted.

colleagues. So he remained quite as much at odds with the United Kingdom government as he now was with the IRA.

Yet, if he had critics and enemies – from time to time he received death threats, some of which had to be taken very seriously – his persistence in going to the aid of those most in need with quiet kindness and generosity often won over harsh critics. When in 1998 he retired from St. Patrick's Academy and became Parish Priest of nearby Carrickmore, a local group of IRA supporters objected noisily to his appointment, and, when he met with members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, some parishioners asked for his appointment to be rescinded. But it was not long before his personal qualities won over all but his harshest critics. The church had raised him to the rank of Monsignor in 1995, a recognition that he was an exemplar of the priestly life. And he had great political hopes of what might flow from the Good Friday Agreement, but without illusions about how long genuine reconciliation would take to achieve. He was happy that Northern Ireland, by remaining British, continued to enjoy those health and welfare benefits that made the life of the poor less hard. But he took it that what was now needed was a patience with and a tolerance of those with whom one had been for so long in conflict, difficult virtues, although no more difficult than the virtue of justice, the virtue which he had exemplified for so many years.

The changes in both Northern Ireland and Denis Faul between 1956 and 2006 were remarkable. Equally remarkable were three constants in Monsignor Faul's life. The first was the warmth of his relationships to siblings, other family members, and friends. I am tempted to speak of the energy that he expended in sustaining them, but this would be misleading, since they sustained him. The second was his continuing passion for Gaelic football. While he was Principal of St. Patrick's Academy, their team won the Hogan Cup, for which secondary school teams throughout Ireland compete. Nothing could have given him more pleasure. The third was his appetite for learning, for understanding what the live issues were in contemporary theological and philosophical debate and coming to terms with them. Here he read widely, as critically engrossed by the Protestant Stanley Hauerwas as by the Catholic Jean Porter. Toward the end of his life he set himself to learn Hebrew. (These reports of Monsignor Faul's interests and attitudes derive from conversations and correspondence during the last fifteen years of his life.)

It was others who characterized his theological commitments as conservative. They were in particular angered by his resistance to proposals that Catholic children in Northern Ireland should no longer be educated

in Catholic schools, but that Catholic and Protestant children should be educated together in state schools. The liberal proponents of this change were well intentioned. They believed that only thus would the members of the Unionist and Republican communities be freed from their traditional and deadly antagonisms. It was Monsignor Faul's view by contrast that the members of the two communities had to be reconciled without losing their identities, an immensely difficult, but worthwhile task. A distinctively Catholic education was essential for the formation of educated Catholics able to take on this task, but the task itself was political. At the end of his life, he said that the only party that he could now have voted for was the Workers' Party, the Marxist heirs to his old associates in the Association for Legal Justice.

Monsignor Faul died of cancer on June 21, 2006. There was a very large gathering indeed at his funeral Mass, not only family, friends, and parishioners, but grateful former prisoners and their families, hunger strikers, and leading members of Sinn Fein, the latter anxiously insisting in interviews with the press that they were only there because of Monsignor Faul's earlier role in the conflicts of Northern Ireland. It would have amused him greatly to see a congregation of so many genuinely good people together with a handful of rampant scoundrels.

### 5.6 So what?

These then are four examples of agents whose lives exemplified virtues, the kind of lives that we need to understand, if we are to understand what the virtues are. Those lives went well and this not only in respect of desire and practical reasoning. Theirs, like every other life, could have gone badly, and this from no fault of their own, if they had been afflicted with too much or too extreme bad fortune. But those same lives could also have gone badly because of the agent's misdirected desires and flawed practical reasoning. And of course in each of these particular lives, as in every other, there were occasions when desires were in fact misdirected and practical reasoning flawed. What turns out to have been important for all of them is a relationship between the agent's identification of her or his own goals and the agent's understanding of the obstacles to achieving those goals. It matters that in all four cases some of those obstacles came to be understood not merely as inconvenient obstructions to that agent's getting her or his own way, but as wrongs or evils to be confronted as wrongs or evils.

The obstacles in each case were notably different from those in the other three. The lethal anti-Semitism encountered by Grossman was prejudice of

an altogether different kind and order from the mindless prejudice against women in the American legal profession that O'Connor had to overcome. The ethnic and class injustices against which James contended had a very different character from the religious and class injustices identified by Faul. But for all four the agent's conception of her or his own good and of what would be involved in achieving it, even when still relatively immature and inchoate, set her or him in opposition to what were taken to be intolerable wrongs and evils. So that we should perhaps take seriously the thought that, had it been otherwise, they would not have been conceiving of their own good as a genuine good. To set oneself to achieve one's good as a good always may be and often is inseparable from setting oneself against those particular wrongs and evils that stand in the way of achieving it and not just because they stand in the way of achieving it. But, if this is so, then this will be reflected in the objects of the agent's desires and in her or his practical reasoning.

Consider first how it is with objects of desire. Those who have learned to discriminate between objects of desire that they have good reason to pursue from those that it is better to put on one side will already in so doing have identified goals that it would be good for them to pursue. They know by now how to rank order goods and they will reason accordingly, but at some point they may find themselves frustrated by often unanticipated barriers to their achieving their goals. How they respond involves them in answering the question: Are these particular barriers something for them to find their way around or through with as little cost as possible or do they instead represent some type of wrong or evil so intolerable that, even if they can avoid being frustrated by them on this occasion, their response cannot but be one of strong emotion, of intense desire that an end should be put to those barriers and not only for them? Of someone not so moved, someone lacking such an intense desire, it is highly probable that their desire to achieve their own good qua good is defective. They do not care enough about that good as good to be outraged, even if quietly outraged, by the bad and the evil.

If they do care enough, they will from now on reason in some significantly different ways. For they will have an additional goal or set of goals and on particular occasions they will have to consider how the achievement of their own immediate particular good in these particular circumstances is related to their commitment to struggle against this or that evil that they have identified. So it was on many occasions for both Grossman and James. But their examples may be misleading. For a great many agents much of the time, evils that they encounter in their everyday lives as barriers to their

goals, evils such as petty greed, selfishness, callousness, and heedlessness, sometimes institutionalized, do not present themselves in anything like the large, world historical terms of the Stalinism of Grossman's youth or the imperialism of James'. Yet the relationship between such agents' genuinely caring about their own good as good and not merely as theirs and their being moved to struggle against those evils as evils and not merely as barriers to the achievement of their own particular goals is one and the same, as it was in the case of Grossman and James. And as with desires, so is it too with practical reasoning. Such agents in the routines of their everyday lives will have not only goals that are peculiarly their own, but also, if they care about their own good qua good, commitments to struggle against certain types of evil, something that has to find a place in their practical reasoning.

With this in mind we can now ask what it is about these four lives that make them instructive about what it is to live well, to desire and to act so that one has good reasons for desiring and acting as one does. But here we need to be careful. I maintained earlier that we can only understand political and moral generalizations and the concepts to which they give expression if we know how to apply them to some range of particular cases. Hence the need for the turn to narrative. Now, after narrating these four lives, it should also be clear that we can understand such narratives adequately only if we also understand the relevant generalizations and concepts. Theoretical understanding and narrative understanding turn out to be inseparable. Yet it is also true that what each narrative shows is the singularity of each life, the degree to which its particularities resist capture by generalizations. This is why such narratives are, if true to the facts, not edifying in any simple way, not a source of easy moral examples, even although exemplary narratives of admirable lives. Those who do not recognize their complexity may make the mistake of supposing that we can formulate some set of generalizations sufficient for practical use in advance of decision and action, generalizations that might function as prescriptions for anyone and everyone. If this were so, one moral life could be in its salient aspects a mere repetition of another, something that the singularity of each life precludes. Nonetheless, the four lives that we have examined do have important common features, especially in their early stages.

There are first those features that belong to the initial formation of character. Different as the early childhoods and education of O'Connor, James, and Faul were – about Grossman's childhood we know too little – it is evident that, as all three well recognized, it was family and school that made them able to and anxious to learn and to develop beyond family and



school. So here generalizations are certainly to the point and the empirical studies of psychologists relevant. Three qualities are crucial at this early stage, since where they are lacking the further development of key virtues will be difficult, perhaps impossible. One is that reliability, that dependability, which justifies others in forming expectations about how and to what one will respond. A second closely related quality is that of truthfulness, so that others can rely upon what one asserts. Without these two qualities, certain types of relationship, including certain types of friendship are impossible, just the types of relationship that are characteristically and generally needed for the further development of character. A third badly needed quality is of a different kind. It is that of being able to imagine alternative courses of action to those in which one is presently engaged, different goals, different ways of achieving one's present goals, so that one is compelled to ask what reasons one has for continuing as one does and how those reasons compare with the reasons for acting otherwise. Without such an imagination and without good judgment as to when to exercise it, one will inevitably be a defective practical reasoner. All three qualities are generally marks of a good upbringing.

To say this is to supplement and extend what was said earlier about the nature of such an upbringing. And a consideration of the large differences between the four lives similarly supplements and extends what was said earlier still about how very different lives that give expression to one and the same conception of human flourishing can be. What I emphasized then were differences that result from the particularities of the different cultures in which those lives are lived out. Yet while the differences between the lives of Grossman, O'Connor, James, and Faul are partly a matter of the culture that each inhabited, what are as notable are differences that are marks of the distinctive individuality of each agent's desires and practical reasoning. For it is one of the characteristics of a good practical reasoner to be able to identify the relevant particularities of her or his situation, what it is on occasion about that situation that makes it difficult to apply generalizations and dangerous to rely on precedents. The negative prohibitions of the precepts of the natural law, as I stressed earlier, by telling us only what not to do, characteristically leave open a range of possibilities.

Which particularities in an agent's situation are relevant to her or his decision making is a matter of which goods are at stake in that particular situation and of their relative importance in that situation. How clearly agents perceive what is at stake and how adequately they judge often depends on how far they are able to take into account not just how that situation appears to them, but also how it appears to those others

who are involved in that situation, especially those others with whom they cooperate in the achievement of common goods. And that ability is acquired only through deliberating with perceptive and truthful others, so that one becomes able to transcend what would otherwise be the limitations of one's own particular standpoint, as I already noticed. It matters then what common goods one acknowledges and what kinds of friend one has, something that makes it all the more important that children should develop those qualities of character without which they cannot hope both to care about relevant common goods and to have good friends of very different kinds. Such care for common goods and such a capacity for friendship are salient characteristics of each of the four lives that I have narrated.

Some of Grossman's key relationships were forged in his earlier life, some during his wartime and postwar experiences, some in the Soviet literary world. O'Connor developed close ties to a wide range of different types of American, among them family members, farm workers, law clerks. James was as at home with cricketers as novelists, with Lancashire trade unionists as Detroit auto workers, not to speak of his family ties. Faul had the same close family ties, continuing friendships with school colleagues, with some priests and some members of the Workers' Party, and with all those of us in whom he inspired lasting affection. Take away their friendships and you would also take away what was crucial to their desires and to their practical reasoning. It is an insufficiently appreciated Aristotelian and Thomistic thought that one of the marks of a fully rational agent is that she or he characteristically and generally has a variety of good friends.

To have good friends one must be a good friend and to be a good friend requires that one have not only the qualities of reliability and dependability and the virtue of truthfulness, but also the two virtues of integrity and constancy, integrity, so that one's commitments do not vary from situation to situation, constancy, so that those commitments endure over time. Bad character may sometimes in these respects be a mirror image of good character, an unvarying and enduring commitment, for example, to getting one's own way. But such an unvarying and enduring commitment makes continuing friendships, as contrasted with temporary alliances, impossible. It matters then how an agent's integrity and constancy are perceived by relevant others. It is characteristically their judgments about the agent's character, not the agent's judgments about her or himself, that are to the point. And it is those relevant others who are generally best able to judge of the overall directedness or lack of directedness in a particular agent's life. In what does this overall directedness consist?

It has two aspects, one of which we noted earlier, both of which are exemplified in all four lives. The first is a pattern of development in the ordering of goods on particular occasions, so that some good or goods emerge as having overriding importance. a good or goods that cannot be finally and perfectly achieved by achieving this or that on some particular occasion. So it was with Grossman's self set task of representing Russia to Russians as it is, a goal not to be finally achieved by writing this or that particular book, no matter how great his literary achievement. So it was with O'Connor's conception of what it is to live a life of public service, a goal not to be finally achieved by serving well in this or that office, no matter how distinguished. So it was too with James' self-set task of communicating an understanding of our shared past so that we know who and what we are in remaking the present and with Faul's conception of a fully just and compassionate social order. To understand the directedness of these lives is to recognize that they all remain incomplete. Their directedness points beyond the particular goods that were their goals.

From time to time, however, rational agents need to take stock of what end or ends it is toward which they will be moving, if they continue to act as they now do. How they reflect on those occasions will depend on what kind of person they have by then become, and it is here that a second aspect of the overall directedness of their lives has to be considered. For as they move toward the achievement of various goods, they too change, developing and strengthening some traits, while losing others, so that there is a story to be told about how their desires and their reasons for desiring what they desire became whatever it is that they now finally are. They will, insofar as they understand themselves, recognize that the changes in their desires and so in themselves have had and have an overall direction, although on this too the self-awareness of agents may continue to need correction by the judgments of relevant others. Here once again the examples of the four agents whose lives I have narrated may be misleading. For although all four were at times or in some respects unaware of some of their limitations, all four came to have remarkably few illusions about themselves, their desires, and their reasons for desiring as they did. They learned earlier or later to see themselves as relevant others would have seen them and how to think truthfully about themselves.

Directedness of these two kinds is then a mark of lives lived well. But directedness toward what? Certainly toward some set of attainable goods, ordered as reason dictates, a set that characteristically changes as agents move from adolescence to middle age and beyond. Yet does this mean that someone who dies before attaining whatever were in her or his case the most

notable of those goods must have somehow failed, must have fallen short of perfecting or completing her or his life, so that we may judge that, if only she or he had lived longer, then they might have perfected or completed that life? To think in this way is, as I argued earlier, to misunderstand. To live well is to act so as to move toward achieving the best goods of which one is capable and so as to become the kind of agent capable of achieving those goods. But there is no particular finite good the achievement of which perfects and completes one's life. There is always something else and something more to be attained, whatever one's attainments. The perfection and completion of a life consists in an agent's having persisted in moving toward and beyond the best goods of which she or he knows. So there is presupposed some further good, an object of desire beyond all particular and finite goods, a good toward which desire tends insofar as it remains unsatisfied by even the most desirable of finite goods, as in good lives it does. But here the enquiries of politics and ethics end. Here natural theology begins.