

Swiss Philosophical Preprint Series

36

Maksymilian Del Mar

The Moral and Political Life of Thoughtfulness

added 19/02/2009

ISSN 1662-937X

© **Maksymilian Del Mar**

The Moral and Political Life of Thoughtfulness

*Maksymilian Del Mar**

Abstract

This paper offers a discussion, with examples and illustrations from both academia and the arts, of thoughtfulness, i.e., roughly, the ability and willingness to widen the scope of (or, sometimes, change) that which one finds insightful and that which one finds valuable. The paper argues that the exercise of thoughtfulness can help us avoid underestimating the demands of moral and political life. It does so because, unlike other approaches to the good (individual or communal), it does not neglect to acknowledge the openness of the future, i.e., the sense in which we cannot foresee who and what will demand our care and concern. Following a general discussion of thoughtfulness, the paper turns to consider implications for the image and practice of moral and political philosophy.

Introduction

It is difficult not to marvel at the sheer range of phenomena which influence our conduct and which enable us to discipline ourselves and each other. An inexhaustive list would include: customs, mores, traditions, rituals, rules, principles, standards, methods, procedures, norms, conventions, rights and laws, as well as path-dependence,¹ the design and structure of spaces and institutions,² peer group pressure, role responsibility, social cognitive shortcuts (such as schemas, categories, and scripts),³ and the social emotions (especially shame and guilt). We would also need to include in this picture the use of deontic language, as well as the reference that is often made to specific standards such as, most formidably, rationality, reasonableness,⁴ truth, and knowledge, but also, perhaps more prosaically, simplicity, clarity, elegance, consistency, and coherence. We may also wish to consider the calls made for order, cohesion, obedience, conformity, belonging, identity, agreement, consensus, stability, and universality. Finally, we may wish to recognise the pull and pleasure of repetition, i.e., of the creation and

* School of Law, University of Edinburgh and Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne. Email: Maksymilian.DelMar@unil.ch.

¹ Consider, for example, the strategies used to maintain order and security at airports: see, e.g., Jones 2008.

² To offer one example from many, consider the discussion of the importance of the design of courts in Rudden 1974.

³ For a helpful overview of this approach to social cognition, see Kaufmann and Clément, forthcoming.

⁴ I distinguish rationality and reasonableness following, amongst others, Elster 2008.

re-animation of patterns, as well as our participation in domains in which we can keep producing infinite variations on a well-settled theme.⁵

Contrasted with this impressive range of normative phenomena are the demands of moral and political life. These demands are not reducible, however we may sometimes wish they were (for that would make moral and political life so much easier), to normative phenomena of the kind mentioned above. In other words, the demands of moral and political life cannot be exhaustively explained or accounted for by a theory of, say, the nature and function of reasons, or rules, norms, conventions, rights, laws, etc. That we are sometimes tempted to think these demands can be so met is visible from many quarters of theoretical inquiry, not least in those that focus on the problems of motivation and obligation (in moral, political and legal theory alike), where it is sometimes assumed not only that we already know what the appropriate course of conduct will be in any given situation (if we follow the method for ascertaining appropriateness, as advised by the theorist), but also that human conduct is such that it can act upon and in accordance with some such advice (given, say, in the form of reasons).⁶ This bias towards the analysis of the nature and function of normative requirements themselves is also visible in much of the practical reason approach to the study of the demands of moral and political life.⁷

The demands of moral and political life are not exhausted by or reducible to normative phenomena, however subtly distinguished and however refined their effect on human beings

⁵ See Gombrich 1994 for an illuminating discussion and many illustrations drawn the art of ornamentation.

⁶ Some have sought to soften the blow of this approach by arguing that there are occasions in moral and political life where we cannot, and should not, ‘think about it’, i.e., where something is lost (e.g., the embodiment of mercy, love modesty, or compassion) precisely in the reflection or reasoning about what to do (see, e.g., Bankowski 2001, Gaita 2000, Michelon 2006). Although I admire these efforts, and think there is much to learn from them, I do not draw on them here.

⁷ This topic is too large to elaborate on here. To offer but two examples, John Broome, states that ‘reasoning is correct if it makes your mental states conform to normative requirements you are under’ (Broome 2003, 180). Again, elsewhere in the same paper: ‘Whether a piece of reasoning is correct...is determined by the formal relations that hold amongst the propositions that constitute the contents of the premise-states and conclusion-state’ (Broome 2003, 185). Another prominent theorist, Ralph Wedgewood, in his recent *The Nature of Normativity* states that ‘we count as thinkers because we are appropriately sensitive to normative requirements, the source of which is a coherent system of eternal and necessary truths about what we ought to think or do or feel’ (Wedgewood 2007, 3). A recent exception, and one that tries to merge the insights of Immanuel Kant and Adam Smith, is MacCormick 2009.

is said to be (e.g., however nuanced a theorist is in the struggle to find a middle path between internalism and externalism, or cognitivism and non-cognitivism). This is so for two reasons. First, we cannot foresee, now or in the distant future, who or what will require and need our care and concern. Second, precisely because of the difficulties associated with the foreseeability of future objects of care and concern, we must cultivate the ability and willingness to be sensitive, inquiring and critical enough to see and hear the suffering and vulnerability that is often hidden, or at least stultified or made invisible, by the many influences on our conduct. An approach to the good (whether individual or communal) that focuses on the nature and function of normative requirements themselves need not be at odds with these insights; but it can, and it traditionally has, neglected their significance.

There are many possible terms here that might help us understand the need for the respect of the openness of the future: sensitivity has already been used, as has inquiry and criticism, but there are others, such as wonder, openness, and responsiveness. The umbrella term used for these in this paper is that of thoughtfulness.

It is impossible to provide an exhaustive account of what thoughtfulness requires. This is precisely because it consists, at least partly, in the art of thinking otherwise, of resisting the gravitational pull of the many influences on our conduct. However, one should not think that this resistance is tantamount, as many thinkers have previously thought, to withdrawal from life: from appearances; the temptations of the body; the alleged unreliability of the senses; the alleged seductions of emotions; the mess and unpredictability of social and intimate interaction; and other things besides (see, volume one of Arendt 1971a for a classic discussion). On the contrary, it is an important feature of thoughtfulness that it asks us to acknowledge that we cannot participate in life without being steeped in all our limitations: of our point of view; of the body we are born with and further grow into; of the time and place we live in; of forms of life we engage in (professionally and otherwise); of our emotional

lives; and of the dominant ways of making sense of the past, present and future that we tend to share with the fellow members of our generation. Although thoughtfulness will need, on occasion if not always, to be out of place and out of time – disrupting, interrupting, unhooking us from our hinges, and catapulting us out of our homes – it ought not to be seen as an antithetical to life, as something that can stand outside or above it.⁸ To think we can withdraw or detach ourselves⁹ in such a fashion – and enter, thereby, some exclusive club that dwells in immortal armchairs – is, in fact, to disavow the responsibility of thoughtfulness.

But what is thoughtfulness, then, if it is not a matter of withdrawal or detachment? How can we provide a positive picture of this ability and willingness to think otherwise? How can we show glimpses, with examples and illustrations, of the exercise of thoughtfulness, rather than simply exhorting the need, as important as that may be, for facing up to our limitations – to our fallibility, animality and mortality? And how can we show – though, of course, never prove – that the exercise of thoughtfulness may help us avoid underestimating the demands of moral and political life? The challenge of this paper is to tackle these questions.

There are a number of provisos that must be mentioned at the outset. The first of these is that it may seem as if the approach taken here suggests that there is progress in meeting the demands of moral and political life. One may be tempted to think there is progress when we recall, for example, that women and black persons now have the right to vote; that homosexual persons can co-habit (though, in many places, not yet marry); that we have at

⁸ Kafka has an extraordinary parable in which he illustrates this desire for withdrawal particularly powerfully: ‘He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment – and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet – he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.’ The parable is quoted in Arendt 1961, 7.

⁹ The term ‘detachment’ is used positively and analysed extensively in Norbert Elias, 1987 – an often neglected work in this context.

least considered, and in some places, improved, the opportunities for a full life for disabled persons; and that we have at least begun to respect the environment for its own sake and for the sake of the quality of life for future generations. Although some polities may not do so well with all of these, there is a good deal of consensus – even allowing for scepticism about universality – that these are important goals or achievements, without which the moral and political quality of our lives would be greatly diminished. Does this mean we can say we have progressed, morally and politically? The answer depends on what effect the idea of progress would have on our conduct, should we choose to believe in it. Although I cannot address this here any further, my hunch is that we can do without it – that we do not need this idea in order to strive to meet the demands of moral and political life.¹⁰ Furthermore, if there is any chance – and it seems to me that there is – that the idea of progress can make us a little bit more complacent, and thus a little more likely to underestimate the demands of moral and political life, then we should positively refrain from accepting it or relying on it.

That there are so many ways for us to make ourselves feel good about ourselves – often to the detriment of what is here called thoughtfulness – is part of the problem with the idea of progress. As Friedrich Nietzsche once put it, ‘Man is very well defended against himself...usually he is able to make out no more of himself than his outer fortifications’ (Nietzsche 1984, 9). We tend, both as individuals and as communities, not only to remember (and build monuments to) that which places us in a good light – to think of ourselves as heroic, wise, good, etc – but also to attempt to influence what is happening, and what we anticipate and hope will happen, in such a way that we may show what we consider to be our strengths and hide what we consider to be our weaknesses. Psychologists have now been pointing out for a long time just how self-serving we can be in the maintenance of our self-

¹⁰ For a different view, see Nussbaum 2007b.

images, and how violently we can react when we feel that that self-image is under threat.¹¹ Under the canopy of our own hindsight and memory, we all look pretty good. Of course, not always will our attachments and reactions be pernicious: to think that would be to edge closer towards the antithesis of thoughtfulness, i.e., of withdrawal from life and our limitations. But being aware of just how tenacious and how powerful these self-serving myths are can help us make room for the ability and willingness to think otherwise, and to widen the scope or, sometimes, change that which we find insightful and that which we find valuable.

The second proviso worth noting is that by focusing here on a positive picture of thoughtfulness, it should not be thought that theoretical work on how to conceptualise normative pluralism – of our involvement in many different domains, spaces, and groupings, all of which influence our conduct in different ways – is being dismissed. On the contrary, this paper acknowledges that this kind of work is very important. Further, the view expressed here is not necessarily at odds with, though it certainly is critical of the dangers involved in, work on finding overlapping consensus (Rawls 1971), including agreeing on some minimum content (e.g., of natural law, as in Hart 1994). It is also not necessarily at odds with work that identifies various strategies of and for maintaining legitimacy, such as the deferral of the problematisation of something already agreed to by, for example, introducing exceptions rather than endangering the general rule, or by instituting procedures and other forms of the constitutionalisation of politics.¹² This work is important. But the problem is that it can also be taken too far – sometimes to the detriment of a more circumspect study of the demands of moral and political life. Sometimes, this kind of work results in a form of impatience and intolerance for disagreement, disorder, indeterminacy and unpredictability. It can also lead to a form of arrogance in which we feel we have attained some absolute picture, for all future

¹¹ Early on in *Culture and Value* (1980), Ludwig Wittgenstein said: ‘the edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work.’

¹² There has been a very loud push for constitutionalisation in both legal and political theory in recent years. Much of this has come from German scholarship, where that tradition is arguably the strongest. For helpful discussions and overviews, see Walker 2008a and 2008b.

times and places, of the good life or the common good (or, only somewhat less disastrously, some method for achieving that). Within legal theory, for example, such work can – although, I stress, it need not – lead to a concept of the rule of law as one of establishing ‘a coercive order of public rules addressed to rational persons for the purpose of regulating their conduct and providing the framework for social co-operation’ (Rawls 1971, 235), rather than, as would appear to be more respectful of the demands of moral and political life, a conception of the rule of law as a space for discussion, disagreement and debate, occasionally (and laudably) leading to revisable and defeasible agreement (see, e.g., MacCormick 2005). It is not enough, in all of this, though it is certainly a very important improvement, to argue that ‘justice is conflict’, but that we can agree on some immutable and timeless procedure for arguing about justice (see Hampshire 2000).¹³ Thought itself, and the practice of theory more generally, can all too easily lend themselves towards the complacency that accompanies assuming or positing or trying to reach some ground that is certain. But to succumb to this tendency – to argue, for example, that we have reached the end of history (see, most notoriously, Fukuyama 1992) – is to forget not only the great contingency of things coming to be as we currently think they are,¹⁴ but also the openness of the future, and ultimately, also, the fact that life always has had, and will always have, more imagination than we do.

There is, finally, a third proviso to note here. Thoughtfulness is not hereby offered as the key for or ground of moral and political life. It is also not being prescribed as that which we ought to constantly engage in. Neither in theoretical life, nor in everyday life, can we constantly maintain the kind of sensibility or sensitivity that thoughtfulness espouses. Similarly so for the demands of moral and political life: we can never meet or satisfy these, or achieve any kind of guarantee that we have met or satisfied them. What we can do, however,

¹³ Of course, both of these claims are very strong and in want of a more elaborate defence. I cannot do so here, but I hope that the account of the demands of moral and political life described below does provide some support for them.

¹⁴ On the historical contingency of a ‘democratic liberal state with a capitalist economy, and a commitment to a set of human rights for its citizens’ (3): see Geuss 2001.

and much to our peril, is underestimate these demands. It is the task of an account of thoughtfulness, then, to play its inevitably modest role in helping us to avoid such a calamitous outcome.

The paper has two parts. The first part offers a stock of illustrations and examples – some drawn from personal experience; others from other sources, including literary as well as academic. The focus, in each section, is on revealing some feature, or offering a glimpse of, the exercise of thoughtfulness, and on how this exercise may assist us in not underestimating the demands of moral and political life. The examples offered will be frustrating – they are frustrating to write, and they are bound to be frustrating to read. This is because all they can do is convey something of the difficulties involved; something of the perplexities that can be shared but not resolved. This, however, is as it should be; for if it were otherwise, it might suggest that the demands of moral and political life can, at least sometimes, be satisfied. The second part of the paper turns to certain implications for the practice of moral and political philosophy.

I. The Exercise of Thoughtfulness

IA. Beginnings

At one point in *The Human Condition*, Arendt says the following:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin, is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope...which Greek antiquity ignored altogether.... It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most sufficient expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their ‘glad tidings’: ‘A child has been born unto us.’ (Arendt 1958, 247; quoted in Kristeva 2008, 358-9)

The energy behind the idea of a beginning is not merely faith and hope, though that would already be a great deal. It is also that of renewal, and, more specifically, the difficulty of beginning anew, of starting all over again. This notion of a beginning is quite different, as

many have pointed out, though perhaps none better than Edward Said in his *Beginnings* (1985), to the notion of an origin. The hankering for an origin is a hunger for roots that cannot be pulled out; that will remain no matter what. A beginning, by contrast, signifies the courage of realising that what one has previously produced, whether it be an artwork or a piece of academic writing, or whatever one has previously thought appropriate or agreed on with one's fellows, can be revised, negotiated and re-negotiated, attempted once more, and learnt from indefinitely.

The difficulty of a beginning, though, is yet more interesting. For a beginning also implies that one not only tries again, but that one tries in a different key – that one tries to slip out of the groove that one's thoughts slide into so easily; that one finds the energy to push oneself in a direction that one has not yet dared venture. An incredible illustration of this feat is offered in Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller...* (1998). In that novel, a protagonist, known as 'You', attempts to, and is always about to, finish a novel, save for some mishap or misadventure. The meta-narrative plays with numerous constraints that need not interest us here.¹⁵ The relevant and remarkable point is that Calvino manages to write the ten different books 'You' attempt to finish in completely different styles. That this is difficult can be witnessed by any reader (let alone writer) who finds she keeps returning to certain authors precisely because of the pleasure of once again enjoying a signature style or structure, which may, in turn, be a slight variation on a favourite genre. The book took Calvino ten years to complete; he wrote and rewrote each beginning until he felt it could stand up on its stylistic feet; until it utterly distinguished itself from the other nine beginnings.¹⁶

¹⁵ The constraints are based on the semantic squares of A.C. Greimas. Calvino was a member of Oulipo, the Association of Open Literature, which encouraged constraint writing.

¹⁶ To say this is not, of course, denigrate the achievements of writers who remain within or prefer to continue exploring their signature. For example, no less an extraordinary feat than Calvino's was Reinaldo Arenas's *Farewell to the Sea* (1987), which was re-written not twice, but three times, for the previous two drafts were destroyed by the Cuban authorities.

There is yet another way in which we can think about beginnings. The genealogical method, given to us by Nietzsche, and used, perhaps most prominently in contemporary philosophical practice by Bernard Williams (2002), can be brought to bear on, as Nietzsche would have said, the rigidity of the metaphors we have to come rely on and now take for granted. For example, we can come to reflect on how persons may have interacted before they could rely on language, or on any symbolic structure, spoken or written. One can take this further and come to consider how persons related to each other before the introduction of pronouns into the language, or before the introduction of personal names. These kinds of exercises are important; they remind us, for one, that whether we look back or forward in time, what we encounter, if we reflect carefully, is contingency both ways, i.e. that we could have come to be otherwise than we are, and that, just like we could not back then, so now we cannot foresee what we will become. It is only in nightmares and in worlds that exclude the difficulties of moral and political life that we know where we have been and where we will end up.

Sometimes, when faced with an immediate past we would prefer to forget, we are advised to begin anew. This was, for example, the stance taken by some in the ex-Soviet bloc countries, where the new generation was confronted with the question of what to do with the many highly qualified persons who were involved in the running of the Soviet state. In taking this stance, these persons chose to forget (if not to forgive) past deeds, and focus on the future good of the state. Another stance – sometimes said to be the only alternative – was to look back in a destructive way – resulting in ever escalating attempts to ‘cleanse’ or ‘purify’ the new state of unwanted elements. Such horrific policies have been attempted – most recently, amongst the ex-Soviet states, by Poland’s lustration scheme. Here, however, attempting to forget the past or attempting to purify the present by destroying its alleged traces are both

responses that seek an everlasting solution. In his poem, 'The God Abandons Antony', C.P.

Cavafy opens up for us a third possibility:

At midnight, when suddenly you hear
an invisible procession going by
with exquisite music, voices,
don't mourn your luck that's failing now,
work gone wrong, your plans
all proving deceptive – don't mourn them uselessly:
as one long prepared, and full of courage,
say goodbye to her, to Alexandria who is leaving.
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say
it was a dream, yours ears deceived you:
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.
As long as one is prepared, and full of courage,
as is right for you who were given this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with deep emotion,
but not with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen – your final pleasure – to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.
(Cavafy 1998)

If we take Cavafy's counsel, we will neither hide from the past (we will not say 'it was a dream'), nor will we return to it without 'deep emotion', without a willingness to learn from it, be surprised by it. But neither will we remain wedded to the past or to any one way (particularly any self-serving way) of understanding it; instead, we will look forward, with courage, our foresight sharpened by humility. We will, then, be ready to ceaselessly negotiate and re-negotiate both our understanding of the past and its legacy, as well as our relationships with those with whom we share (and, indeed, might share) a polity.

To say this is to point to the first of our many ambiguities, difficulties, perplexities. If we are tempted to think of a beginning as a matter of finding an everlasting solution from which we can emerge purely and cleanly into a new adventure, then we cannot rely on the notion of a beginning to help us avoid underestimating the demands of moral and political life. But even if we think of a beginning as the third option, this middle path, it is not exactly

clear – and, the point is that it cannot be – what is demanded by ‘ceaseless negotiation and re-negotiation.’

IB. The Imaginary

Part of what makes the notion of a beginning a promising – though as we also saw, an inadequate – notion for our attempt at understanding the demands of moral and political life, is that it opens up possibilities, particularly for not yet explored paths. It is this ability and willingness that is also one of the most important features of thoughtfulness. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt referred to Eichmann’s thoughtlessness as a lack of imagination (Arendt 1964, 287-8). In this section, I want to explore the notion of the imaginary, but suggest that this ability and willingness to think otherwise – to think, in other words, that which one has not previously recognised – is central to its exercise. Imagination has not always – in fact, it has arguably rarely – been conceptualised in this fashion. Most of the time, imagination is said to be the ability to project before one or in one’s ‘mind’s eye’ things that are immediately absent from one’s senses. If not this conception, then the most often drawn on conception in moral and political philosophy is related to empathy, i.e., to the ability and willingness to imagine oneself in the position of another, seeing the world from their perspective, understanding some of the difficulties faced by another, and so on.¹⁷ There is no doubt that both – though particularly the second – can and has contributed to moral and political life.¹⁸ In many respects, the second conception is quite close to the conception about to be explored, i.e., it is also concerned with an ability and willingness to understanding something unfamiliar to one. The conception here, however, incorporates that sense, but is also at once more radical.

¹⁷ The literature in support for both of these claims is too large to cite.

¹⁸ Excellent examples are Steven Fesmire’s account of the Deweyan moral imagination as a dramatic rehearsal of possibilities (2003); and Martha Nussbaum’s love’s knowledge (1990).

How can we think about that which we have not yet recognised? How can we resist colonising the world and otherness with images of ourselves, and thus often also with prescriptions based on how we have dealt with the problems we have confronted in our lives? That this is easier said than done is visible if only in academic practice. Pierre Bourdieu has not been the only theorist – though certainly one of the few – to have not only noticed, but also loudly proclaimed, that theorists tend to understand other human beings on their model (Bourdieu 1990). In other words, those most steeped in self-examination, self-awareness, self-consciousness, constant deliberation and reasoning, also tend to be those who, when it comes to giving advice on how to deal with the demands of moral and political life, will counsel self-examination, self-awareness, self-consciousness, constant deliberation and reasoning....

I recently attempted an exercise that I found extremely difficult. I attempted to draw imaginary shapes, i.e., on the conception of the imaginary used here, shapes I have never before recognised as shapes. Try as I might, all I could produce were complex shapes that were conglomerations of shapes previously known to me (squares, circles, dots, etc). I tried to close my eyes and not think about what I was doing, but this produced even worse effects – either I produced, as one is apt to do via this automatic method, shapes I had been subliminally exposed to (such as, for example, letters) or completely formless things. Of course, it is that realm of ‘completely formless things’ I was after. But here is where the lesson of the imaginary is really the most powerful: I cannot simply aim for something that I have not yet recognised. When I do, I either fail miserably or I do not know when I have found it. And yet, I want to suggest, it is precisely this frustration – this courage to continue to try to understand despite knowing you cannot succeed, that has to be part of our attempt to avoid underestimating the demands of moral and political life.

When I began to live with another human being, a human being I love very much, I eventually learnt the lesson that all of us who come to love another human being must learn,

i.e., I learnt that my understandings of another human being are always incomplete and inadequate; that the other is always more complex, infinitely more complex, than I can ever, at any one time, comprehend. If one does not come to learn this lesson, one does not love another human being, but an image, an ideal – and then one is either not loving another, or worse, one is only in love with oneself. In this respect, it is worth noting that it does not appear to be a coincidence that Emmanuel Levinas chose to remind us of our tendency to subsume the other under the empire of the same and the familiar by asking us to confront the face of the other (see, e.g., Levinas 1969). When we look carefully, our two faces, facing each other, are like mirrors: infinite in how we reflect one another.

And yet, we would be risking underestimating the demands of moral and political life if we presented this openness to otherness, this courage of looking for something one cannot find, this attention to the not-yet recognisable, as a value without its own dangers. For there is value in the same and the familiar. That value consists in the need for, and the advantages that can come with, achieving even temporary agreement on matters of great controversy (this has been pointed out, perhaps most prominently, by John Rawls; it is arguably, also, what animated and perhaps continues to animate the human rights agenda). Further, and more prosaically, we need a good deal of sameness and familiarity for all the remarkable feats of everyday co-ordination: without it, we could not drive safely to work in the morning, be warned of the impending storm by the radio in the car, be woken up by a good cup of coffee, and have a hot rather than cold shower (or indeed a shower at all). Sameness and familiarity are not necessarily a sign of solipsism; they may also be a sign of sharing and being willing to share.

Of course, if we remain for too long in the comfort of our own home, caring only for those closest to us, we shall fail in not underestimating the demands of moral and political life. We are born not only into a family, but also into certain systems of the distribution of

resources, on whatever level of complexity, from the home to the globe. For some of us, these will be in our favour, and, if we continue to cling to that which is comfortable and familiar (as we are wont to do if we are already well off), then we will be loathe to confront the need for a change that gives equal opportunity for all. If we are not able to widen the scope of, or, sometimes, change, that which we find valuable, we will lead greatly impoverished moral and political lives. But if we do not salvage some stability and predictability; if we do not rely, and act, confidently, with reliance on certain ways of making sense of ourselves and others – at least for a time – then we will not survive. Hence, again, the extraordinary difficulties, the frustrations, the confusions of moral and political life.

IC. Encounters

Time and again, philosophers have had to remind themselves that there is wonder in the ordinary, discovery in the trivial, and surprise in the feature most taken for granted – in short, that there are great spoils of life right under our noses. At various times, it has taken great feats of imagination, and courage, by certain philosophers to open themselves up to whatever they may receive from an encounter with, say, nature (as in Henry Thoreau), or Hollywood film (as in Stanley Cavell), or everyday utterances (as in J.L. Austin) and everyday forms of life (as per Ludwig Wittgenstein) – to mention but a few. As Arendt pointed out in *The Life of the Mind*, there has always been a temptation – at least since Plato, if not before – to withdraw from that which is around us, and into the Olympian realm of that which can never be, and could never have been, otherwise (see Arendt 1971a). The notion of an encounter, i.e., as openness to whatever may come, and thus a form of resistance to the temptation to withdraw and disengage, is in that respect, an important feature of thoughtfulness.

How do we encounter human beings, especially for the first time? In a recent workshop, I was asked to draw the body of a human being who stood on the other side of a

transparent sheet, and who, in turn, drew me at exactly the same time. As I struggled to keep up with his body – for he too was moving while he drew – I noticed that the same difficulties were being experienced by him. The outline that my felt pen produced was very erratic; the lines were wobbly; some of the features (such as the nose, the eyes and the mouth) were overlapping; the proportions were all out of whack. Of course, on one level, this activity reminded me of my inability to draw; but on another level, I realised that this was the first time I had encountered another human being for the first time, at least as intimately as this, without speaking – without suffocating our encounter by, and drowning our encounter in, words. I was enabled, and also simply allowed, again for the time, to look at another human being's face without anticipating a response; slowly, simply looking, allowing myself to be disoriented, dislocated, even uncomfortable at first.

In another activity in this same workshop, I was asked to sit opposite – back to back – with another person, and draw their voice as they described an object to me. Again, I had never simply listened to another person's voice, at least not with this much intensity, and certainly not with the task of drawing it. In yet another activity, I was asked to stand next to a person, and cease controlling my hand and my fingers while still holding a piece of charcoal, and allow the other person to take my hand and draw with it on a large sheet of paper before us. Once again, I had not previously encountered another human being's body in this fashion – certainly not with as much trust as this required of someone I had met only a few hours before.

When we consider the speed with which we usually encounter anyone in our daily lives – sometimes, even those with whom we share our intimate lives at home – we may begin to wonder whether we have really ever encountered anyone at all. The restlessness of our individual lives – the need always to have plans, projects, goals – also translates into our social lives: we need, it seems, always to be focused together on something, be speaking

about something, doing something with a certain aim together. How rarely do we explore each other's physicality without a certain end in mind? How often do we just dwell in each other's presence – excluding cases of moments of respite from, i.e., those uncomfortable silences in between, conversation? How come we find it so difficult to relax in each other's company, doing nothing – just as we find it so difficult to stand somewhere, doing nothing? But it is precisely this difficulty, perhaps impossibility – of a kind of motionlessness, openness, maximum responsiveness – that is, at least on the conception offered here, a central feature of the encounter.

When we recall the speed with which we encounter others, we can also bring to mind the usual schemas, scripts, categories, types, metaphors, analogies, similarities, and so on, that we rely on in order to orient ourselves, and in order to make the necessary rapid, or, sometimes, instantaneous, judgements that modern life so often requires. As much as they facilitate these kinds of interaction – perhaps necessary for a certain amount of co-ordination to take place fluidly and seamlessly – these schemas and scripts, etc, also form barriers between us, obstacles to the kinds of encounters that can be of most significance in our understanding of the infinity of others. Is it too late? Have we proceeded too far down the highway of modern life to turn back? Are our production lines too big, our societies too complex, for us not to participate, often unwittingly, in structures of role responsibility, professional identification, and other forms of distinction (for the latter, see Bourdieu 2007)?

To ask these questions is not to suggest there is an answer. On the contrary, we can, and indeed should, offer opportunities for different kinds of encounters than those we are sometimes forced to endure in everyday life; of course, wherever possible, we may also wish to live a fuller life with those around us. We should certainly cherish those moments when we are standing face to face with no idea of what will happen next. But it would be naïve, and no

doubt destructive, to expect or hope for a world completely deprived of short-cuts, imitation, mirroring, and the projection of our experiences and values onto others.

Having said that, if we do not want to underestimate the demands of moral and political life, we are probably safer in erring on the side of the encounter. We can, in any event, leave the last word here to Reinaldo Arenas's 'My Lover, The Sea':

I am that child with the round, dirty face
who on every corner bothers you with his
'can you spare a quarter?'
I am that child with the dirty face
no doubt unwanted
that from far away contemplates coaches
where other children
emit laughter and jump up and down considerably

I am that unlikeable child
definitely unwanted
with the round dirty face
who before the giant street lights or
under the grandames also illuminated
or in front of the little girls that seem to levitate
projects the insult of his dirty face

I am that angry and lonely child of always,
that throws you the insult of that angry child of always
and warns you:
if hypocritically you pat me on the head
I would take that opportunity to steal your wallet.

I am that child of always
before the panorama of imminent terror,
imminent leprosy, imminent fleas,
of offenses and the imminent crime.

I am that repulsive child that improvises a bed
out of an old cardboard box and waits,
certain that you will accompany me.

ID. Looking

In many of his writings, Wittgenstein entreated us to speak less, look more, and walk as slowly as possible.¹⁹ In *Culture and Value*, for example, he said that ‘in philosophy, the winner of the race is the one who can run most slowly’ (1980, §34). In *Zettel*, he spoke of seeing as connected to looking (1970, §628), and gave the following example:

There is a way of looking at electrical machines and installations (dynamos, radio stations, etc, etc) which sees these objects as arrangements of copper, iron, rubber etc. in space, without any preliminary understanding. And this way of looking at them might lead to some interesting results. It is quite analogous to looking at a mathematical proposition as an ornament. (1970, §711)

The notion of looking used here is akin to that of the notion of encounter used in the previous section, i.e., Wittgenstein suggests to us that we look for, or look out for, that which we have not yet recognised as something (e.g., as a machine, or as a mathematical proposition). One might think that something similar is going on when certain places of worship (particularly in the Islamic tradition) place beautifully crafted inscriptions around the outside perimeter of the building. These can certainly be seen as works of art, but they also have another function. There, the reader of the inscription is, unwittingly, enticed to move in a circle around the building, while reading. The substance of what is written is also often repetitive (e.g., ‘God is Great’), which results in a kind of chant in one’s mind’s eye. Is, this, too a form of looking, a kind of encounter (with God)?

Indeed, there is yet another overlap between looking and the encounter. In this respect, Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), makes for sober reading. The notion of looking (generally, but especially at the pain of others) should, as Sontag argues, be difficult. She is right to warn us of the spectatorship, of the guilty pleasure of the spectacle we have shared with previous generations. She is right to be angry at the manipulation, staging and careful selection of officially commissioned war photography, which was designed to glorify

¹⁹ It is significant, though not often enough acknowledged, that Saul Kripke picked up on this language in his 1982 work on Wittgenstein.

war (see Sontag 2003, ch. 3). But more than anything she is right to point to the difficulty of looking: indeed, of the pain of regarding the pain of others. Sontag speaks, for example, of Francisco's Goya's *The Disasters of War*, which consisted of eighty-three etchings made between 1810 and 1820 that depicted the atrocities perpetrated by Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808 (Sontag 2003, 39). Goya's etchings, says Sontag, are meant to 'wound the viewer' (Sontag 2003, 40). She continues as follows:

Goya's art, like Dostoyevsky's, seems a turning point in the history of moral feelings and sorrow – as deep, as original, as demanding. With Goya, a new standard of responsiveness to suffering enters art... The account of war's cruelties is fashioned as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer. The expressive phrases in script below each image comment on the provocation. While the image, like every image, is an invitation to look, the caption, more often than not, insists on the difficulty of doing just that. A voice, presumably the artist's, badgers the view: can you bear to look at this? (Sontag 2003, 40)

A Goya painting is also used to good effect at the beginning of Michel Serres's book, *The Natural Contract* (1993) – a book dealing with environmental ethics. The painting is 'Fight with Cudgels.'²⁰ Serres asks us to consider what we can see when we look at the painting. We see certainly, he says, a pair of enemies fighting, brandishing sticks. We observe their tactics, answering blow for blow, counterattacking and dodging. We get embroiled in wondering, perhaps even gambling on, who out of the two will win. In all of this, says Serres, we are forgetting one thing – 'a third position, outside the squabble: the marsh into which the struggle is sinking' (1993, 1). What we have lost sight of, then, is 'the sand, the water, the mud, the reeds of the marsh' (1993, 1). What this evocative beginning allows Serres to do is to ask us to reflect on how it is that we, moderns, have acted for so long without considering the impact of our activities on the environment and on future generations. We have been captains of industry, but certainly not captains of the environment. Of course, the 'moderns' qualification is important, for we can learn a great deal from the treatment of the environment by ancient peoples and indigenous populations in, for example, Australia.

²⁰ 1820-1823, Prado Museum, Madrid.

We get glimpses, then, of the exercise of thoughtfulness when our ‘looking’ is led into the chimneys of London (by Charles Dickens), or into the poverty-stricken outskirts of medieval Paris (by Bronislaw Geremek, 2008), or into the factories at Manchester (by Karl Marx), or into the structurally invisible violence perpetrated in Haiti (by Paul Farmer, e.g., 2004), or into the deaths of hundreds of children daily during the sanctions regime in Iraq in the 1990’s (all of which were sanctioned, legitimated, by the various international bodies whose task it is to protect human beings from poverty, famine and destruction; see Veitch 2007). We get glimpses of thoughtfulness when we are pointed to the vulnerabilities of persons whose lives we have not yet imagined; whose vulnerabilities may not be known to us because we do not suffer their ailments – like those disabled persons, who, for want of appropriate forms of transport and the design of public spaces, are unable to participate fully in life (see Nussbaum 2006, chs. 2 and 3).

In looking, as Simone Weil told us, we must pay attention. By that, she meant that we have to suspend our thought, ‘leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object’ (Weil 2005, 8). This means we must venture out; we must be brave enough to leave our home and all that we have already colonised with our understanding; and we have to confront the inevitability of our limitations in understanding anything we meet along the way. When we are able and willing to look, we will undoubtedly see just how much suffering and vulnerability there is around and, sometimes also, within us. But as difficult as this is, moral and political life would be too easy if all we had to do was look, acknowledge, and recognise. For none of us who ventures out can forget he is looking at; that there is a distance created by (and indeed perhaps necessary for) looking; and that in doing so, not only may we miss the opportunity for help, but we may also miss the great courage, strength and joy found by those who live in circumstances that do not leave them much time, or space, for survival.

II. The Thoughtful Practice of Moral and Political Philosophy

Given the difficulties, frustrations, and perplexities of the above discussions, we could do much worse in seeking to consider some of the implications for moral and political philosophy, than by beginning with the work of Isaiah Berlin. Berlin was at pains, in so many of his writings, to point to the need for an acknowledgement of the incommensurability of values, and thus also of the inevitability of conflict between them, which, he argued, called for respect for disagreement and the pluralism of human conceptions of the good life and the common good (see Berlin 1969). Writing thirty years later, Scott Veitch reminds us that ‘the most profound danger lies in assuming that all values are or can be made commensurable’ (Veitch 1999, 73). ‘Politics,’ he says, but we may also add, morality, ‘thrives on conflict. Even more basically, conflict is the condition for politics; without conflict, politics is neither possible nor necessary’ (Veitch 1999, 70). Liberalism, then, à la Berlin, seeks the flourishing of conflict; it sets out to avoid the death of politics, which ensues when ‘societies move toward programmatic solutions to unchallengeable ends already given or imposed’ (Veitch 1999, 71).

According to Veitch, then, following not only Berlin but also Michel Foucault, what moral and political philosophy must resist is the constant pressure of normalisation. Foucault’s genealogical project, for example, seeks in that respect to ‘entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects’ (Foucault, quoted in Veitch 1999, 102). Part of this resistance must also be the refusal to accept that there is a ‘true nature’ for all human beings. The belief in such a nature, according to Berlin, is ‘intimately linked...to the conception that all ends are, finally, commensurable’

and ‘that there can be harmony and not permanent discord in human lives and goals, either now or at some point in history yet to come’ (Veitch 1999, 75).²¹

In our contemporary forms of governance, says Veitch, the reduction or avoidance of incommensurability, and the related focus on means, is connected with the rule of expertise. Following Berlin, Veitch dubs experts ‘the adjusters of conflict’, about whom Berlin said that they are ‘harnessed to producing the maximum of unclouded social contentment compatible with opposition to all experiment outside the bounds of the system’ (in Veitch 1999, 97). Veitch continues as follows:

The tendency to reduce conflict, through a calculus of utility and albeit for the contentment of the many, thus requires the ability to suppress dissent in the name of a system which seeks stabilisation through the ability to neutralise attacks on itself. The most effective means of doing so is of course to attempt to place beyond the bounds of conflict those matters that appear to challenge the system; in other words to turn the sources of political challenge and conflict into disagreement merely about the means to ends already assumed. Moreover, once this stabilisation is seen to be protective of the interests of a significant ‘many’ the desire to curtail conflict, to curtail meaningful politics, becomes potentially overwhelmingly. (Veitch 1999, 97)

If we think that the world is a problem, or a collection of problems, that are capable of solutions, then we will edge ever closer to the precipice that is formed by notions such as a ‘true human nature.’ If we philosophise, then, with the arrogance of thinking that the world (and any domain of activity – social, moral, political) is governed or regulated by rules that allow us to determine, or read off in advance, what is appropriate, correct or good, then we fail to exercise thoughtfulness. As Berlin says, ‘the universe is not a jigsaw puzzle, of which we try to piece together the fragments, in the knowledge that one pattern exists, and one alone, in which they must all fit’ (Berlin, quoted in Veitch 1999, 121). And if that is so, then, once again following Berlin, ‘what this age needs is not more faith,²² stronger leadership, or more scientific organisation. Rather it is the opposite – less Messianic ardour, more

²¹ Berlin also developed this attack on ‘a true human nature’ in his Mary Flexner Lectures, given in the 1950’s, but published only recently (2007).

²² Here, we need not agree with Berlin’s conception of faith; a very different conception is provided, for example, by Rowan Williams (2008) in his work on Dostoyevsky, or by David Hartman in his account of the innovative spirit in Judaism (1985).

enlightened scepticism, more toleration of personal idiosyncrasies' (Berlin, quoted in Veitch 1999, 100).

Another thinker who we can draw on in sketching the thoughtful practice of moral and political philosophy is John Dewey. Like Berlin, and in keeping with other thinkers such as G.W.F. Hegel, Marx and Theodore Adorno, Dewey did not think there was a sharp distinction 'between the merely instrumentally good and that which is inherently or categorically or absolutely good in itself' (Geuss 2001, 126). The blurring of this distinction, as Raymond Geuss puts it, 'marks a watershed in political thought' (Geuss 2001, 126). Indeed, Geuss reminds us that 'Berlin quite correctly noted that the main line of philosophy since Plato had tended to hold that the good was unitary in the sense that it was in principle possible for a state of affairs to exist which was maximally good in all respects' (Geuss 2001, 155). When this legacy – further compounded by Immanuel Kant, Weber and Jürgen Habermas – was confronted by Dewey, he related his opposition to it by appealing both to the virtue of democracy and to the logic of inquiry. As he recounted in many of his writings, including *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *The Public and its Problems* (1927), and *The Quest for Certainty* (1933), the virtue of democracy 'lies precisely in its being, like science, radically open, with everything – assumptions, results, methods, standards of evaluation – in principle subject to revision' (Geuss 2001, 127). Further, 'there is to be nothing fixed as being beyond discussion, no absolute a priori, nothing set down in stone prior to investigation, nothing which can count as a certain, pre-existing categorical obligation; everything is contextual, provisory, and subject to revision in the course of enquiry' (Geuss 2001, 126-7).

The world's arguably best thinkers about thinking, such as Nietzsche and (at least the later) Wittgenstein, would agree with the spirit of Dewey's logic of inquiry. Nietzsche, for example, famously said that 'convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies' (Nietzsche 1984, §1). He also urged us to celebrate disagreement, rather than agreement: 'We

criticise a thinker', he said, 'more sharply when he proposes a tenet that is disagreeable to us; and yet it would be more reasonable to do this when we find his tenet agreeable' (Nietzsche 1984, §2). Similarly, Wittgenstein confessed, in typically modest and evocative fashion, that 'I find it important in philosophising to keep changing my posture, not to stand for too long on one leg, so as not to get stiff. Like someone on a long up-hill climb who walks backwards for a while so as to revive himself and stretch some different muscles' (Wittgenstein 1980, §27e). Wittgenstein's modesty was also on display when he reminded us that 'You do not understand your own transactions, that is to say you do not have a synoptic view of them, and as it were project your lack of understanding into the idea of a medium in which the most astounding things are possible' (Wittgenstein 1970, §273). This gentle reminder of the fact that we cannot stand behind or above ourselves, in control of our thoughts, is a central feature of the exercise of thoughtfulness. But in perhaps the clearest statement of what thoughtfulness might entail, Wittgenstein also said that 'It is very difficult to describe paths of thought where there are already many lines of thought laid down – your own or other people's – and not to get into one of the grooves. It is difficult to deviate from an old line of thought just a little' (Wittgenstein 1970, §349). This ability and willingness to think otherwise; to widen the scope of, or, sometimes, change, that which one finds insightful and valuable, is, if anything can be, the key to thoughtfulness.

What we are confronting here, then, is that there is an intimate relationship between how theorists conceive of the demands of moral and political life, and how they practice moral and political philosophy. If we do not see this connection we miss, as is perhaps usual for us to miss, what is right under our noses, i.e., in this case, that the practice of theory itself has a moral and political life. But when we do consider this connection we notice, again with frustration and perplexity, that there are no easy answers, no models to follow. Of course, we can learn a great deal from the kind of thoughtfulness lived (more than described) by such

figures as Socrates and Diogenes (see, Arendt 1971a, 166-179). Skipping forward in time, we can also learn a great deal from Montaigne. In her recent loving portrayal of Montaigne, Biancamaria Fontana tells us about Montaigne's courageous (for that time) view that although there was a realm of natural law, human beings had no access to it and 'could never reach an agreement about its content' (Fontana 2008, 43). This modesty, and criticism (particularly apt in Montaigne's age of religious conflict) of 'the obstinate, wilful attachment to one's opinion' (Fontana 2008, 130), is visible all throughout the *Essays*. As Fontana notes, 'Montaigne expressed mistrust for all those agents who showed excessive zeal, or proved too passionate, in the defense of a cause' (Fontana 2008, 130). He argued forcefully for, and explored so beautifully in his own writings, 'the limits of experience', and said that 'nothing in fact kept men away from knowledge more effectively than the arrogant and misguided belief of being already in possession of it' (Fontana 2008, 135). Indeed, he went further, and said that it is this 'imperfect, tentative character of experience was inescapable', and that reconciliation 'with the limitations of one's own experience was the necessary precondition for becoming truly human' (Fontana 2008, 139). There was always, in short, a 'gap between the living reality of human experience and the attempts to master it through abstract schemes' (Fontana 2008, 135). When we become 'engaged in Byzantine philological disputes over ancient codes, lost in the pursuit of universal categories' we ignore or risk ignoring 'the destructive impact' that such 'idle speculations' have upon people's lives (Fontana 2008, 135). Montaigne was not an anti-philosopher, or even an anti-intellectual; but he certainly revoked an image and practice of thinking that does not pay attention to the 'the preoccupations and sentiments of the majority of the people, conversing even with the most humble and uneducated' (Fontana 2008, 129). He also rejected a kind of thinking that did not pay attention to that which was most ephemeral and fickle, most fragile and brittle. He said, for example, that when looking, encountering, a situation, we should be aware that a single 'word, an impression, a gesture,

the fleeting emotion of a single moment, could reverse the situation in one's favour or turn it into a disaster' (Fontana 2008, 105).

What Montaigne was recoiling from here was an approach to philosophising, moral and political or otherwise, that was not filled with the awe and humility that accompanies the acknowledgement of the openness of the future; when we acknowledge, in other words, that we are not and cannot be in control of that which is good. This is, arguably, the same lesson we can learn when we recall Iris Murdoch's excellent phrase that goodness alone is sovereign (2001). We can interpret this, somewhat freely, to mean that goodness is not a puppet of a juridical scheme, however complex, or a set of normative requirements, however capable of meeting the resistance of the particular. The juridical way of thinking about the good, i.e., of first constructing and lauding the value of some set of normative requirements (whether in the form of reasons, norms, rules, laws, and so on), and then attempting to hide the inevitably short reach of such requirements (as has been pointed out, so many times, by the situationist, contextualist and particularist strands of moral and political philosophy) misses something vital, and in doing so, risks underestimating the demands of moral and political life.

But what exactly does it miss, you ask? Well, this is the question that this entire paper has sought to address. It is something, we may say in tandem with Cora Diamond, that lies in the difficulty of reality – and thus, also, in the difficulty of philosophy when it faces that reality (Diamond 2008). It is that which resides in the impurity, mess and disorganisation (as Richard Sennett, 1970, characterises it) of Max Weber's ethic of responsibility (as contrasted with his ethic of conviction, from his 1919 lecture, 'Politics as Vocation' and available in Weber 2004). It is that which we catch a glimpse of in Ronald Beiner's insistence that theorists think dangerous thoughts that open intellectual horizons; that they 'probe the normative adequacy of a given vision of social order by pushing that particular vision as far as it will go' (Beiner 1997, ix). It is there in Edward Said's insistence that 'humanism is not

about withdrawal and exclusion’, but about making ‘more things available to critical scrutiny’ (Said 2004, 22), and that in doing so, it also avoids the kind of imperialism and canonisation of history we see when we read Saul Bellow’s demand, ‘Show me the Zulu Proust’ (quoted in Said 2004, 27). It is there in Nussbaum’s endorsement of making room for and confronting ‘the clash within’ (Nussbaum 2007a). It is there in Richard Bernstein’s invocation of pragmatic fallibilism, and thus also, echoing Nietzsche, of the importance of learning ‘to live without “metaphysical comfort”, to live with a realistic sense of unpredictable contingencies – and at the same time to have a passionate commitment to understand, resist and fight concrete evils and oppose injustices’ (Bernstein 2004, 13). It is there in Hilary Putnam’s defence of pragmatic pluralism (about ethical discourses), and in both learning from and being sceptical about enlightenment (Putnam 2004). Something of it also lurks in the sociological imagination (as classically described by C. Wright Mills, 1959); in the humanist imagination (as described recently by Philip Selznick 2008); and in the realism and historical sensibility called for by Geuss’s image of political philosophy (2008).

At stake, in all of these writings, is our understanding of ourselves – as theorists, but also in general, as human beings – and thus of the relationship between the image and practice of thinking, and the thinker’s understanding of the difficulties and perplexities of being human. When we posit the human being always prior to phenomena, engaged in deliberation about what to do; and when we picture human conduct as capable of guidance by normative requirements (as long as he or she resists the temptation of the senses); when we restrict our moral and political theory to questions concerning the motivation and obligation to obey, or the principles said to underwrite the legitimacy of the exercise of power – when we do all this, and exclusively this – we restrict our picture of the human being, and of the frustrating perplexities and irresolvable difficulties of moral and political life, to straw-persons leading straw-lives. If anything, the demands of moral and political life require awe and humility from

us; as well as the knowledge that we can never satisfy them; and the courage to nevertheless pursue them – which is to say that they also demand of us that we keep returning, keep revising, and are never complacent about, our understanding of ourselves and others.

Conclusion

Much of the language of this paper has adopted a somewhat lionised language. I have done so purposely, though without meaning to suggest that it is not absolutely necessary to engage in detailed, exegetical, and technical work in moral and political philosophy, and careful reading of the perplexities expressed in those works. But more often than not – and no less so in the practice of moral and political philosophy – what is needed first is the cultivation of a certain kind of attitude, which also often means stepping back, looking at theoretical tendencies from a certain distance. The attitude I have sought to encourage here is that of thoughtfulness. This willingness and ability to think otherwise (to use but a phrase that can only evoke a response, not provide some immutable content to the idea) is perhaps best captured by Cavafy’s counsel to Antony (quoted above). When we lie in bed, at night, and become suddenly confronted by the thought of death, and our eyes dart open or become moist with fear and sadness, that is precisely when we must resist succumbing to the kind of restlessness we see in the ambition of immortality – an ambition for so long displayed on the pages of philosophers (as Arendt so masterfully shows us in her volume on thinking; see 1971a).

And yet, we could not live, it seems, without the respite gleaned from the exercise of the immortal impulse: of participation in all those worlds (including many theoretical constructions) where we already know what lies ahead; where we have already mastered the rules under which all creatures, in such a world, operate. There is, it seems, too much pleasure in playing the hero, the saviour, the martyr, the oracle – or, in a modern (and, it has to be said, consistently sexist) hue, the figure of James Bond or the Chosen One in the Matrix – for us to

fully adopt the kind of courage of vulnerability that dwells in thoughtfulness. Thoughtfulness is not, in any event, the solution, or the elixir, for meeting the demands of moral and political life. To argue that would be to defeat the spirit of this paper. Thoughtfulness can but remind us – though it is no small feat to do so – that we must not underestimate the demands of moral and political life. Perhaps it can also play its inevitably modest role in helping us to avoid underestimating these demands. If nothing else, this paper has sought to encourage us, as theorists, to begin exercising thoughtfulness in the image and practice of theory – though not only in how and what we write, but, more importantly, in how we encounter colleagues and their works, in how and what we teach, and in all the many other concrete activities of the everyday life of theoretical practice.

References

- Arenas, R. (1987), *Farewell to the Sea: A Novel of Cuba*, trans. A Hurley, London Penguin.
- Arendt, H. (1958), *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Arendt, H. (1961), *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Arendt, H. (1964), *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, London: Penguin.
- Arendt, H. (1971a), *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego: Harcourt.
- Arendt, H. (1971b), 'Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture', *Social Research*, 38:3, 417-446.
- Bankowski, Z. (2001), *Living Lawfully: Love in Law and Law in Love*, Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Beiner, R. (1997), *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory*, Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Berlin, I. (1969), *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berlin, I. (2007), *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, London: Pimlico.
- Bernstein, R. (2004), *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990), 'The Scholastic Point of View', *Cultural Anthropology*, 5:4, 380-391.
- Bourdieu, P. (2007), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Broome, J. (2003), 'Normative Practical Reasoning', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 75:1, 175-193.
- Calvino, I. (1998), *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, trans. W. Weaver, London: Vintage.
- Cavafy, C.P. (1998), *Collected Poems*, trans. E. Keeley and P. Sherrard, London: Chatto and Windus.

- Dewey, J. (1927), *The Public and its Problems*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Dewey, J. (1933), *The Quest for Certainty*, New York: Capricorn.
- Dewey, J. (1938), *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Diamond, C. (2008), 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy', in Cavell, S et al, *Philosophy & Animal Life*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Elias, N. (1987), *Involvement and Detachment*, trans. E. Jephcott, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Elster, J. (2008), *Reason and Rationality*, trans. S. Rendall, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Farmer, P. (2004), 'An Anthropology of Structural Violence', *Current Anthropology*, 45:3, 305-325.
- Fesmire, S. (2003), *John Dewey and the Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Fontana, B. (2008), *Montaigne's Politics: Authority and Governance in the Essais*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, London Penguin.
- Gaita, R. (2000), *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*, 2nd ed, London: Routledge.
- Geremek, B (2008), *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geuss, R. (2001), *History and Illusion in Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gombrich, E.H. (1994), *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, 2nd ed, London: Phaidon Press.
- Hampshire, S. (2000), *Justice is Conflict*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hart, H.L.A. (1994), *The Concept of Law*, 2nd ed, Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Hartman, D. (1985), *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism*, New York: Free Press.
- Jones, R. (2008), 'Checkpoint Security: Gateways, Airports, and the Architecture of Security' in K. Franko Aas, H. Oppen Gundhus, and H. Mork Lomell (eds.), *Technologies of Insecurity*, Routledge-Cavendish, 2008.
- Kaufmann, L and Clément, F. (Forthcoming), 'Social Cognition Revisited'.
- Kripke, S. (1982), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (2008), 'Refoundation as Survival: An Interrogation of Hannah Arendt', *Common Knowledge*, 14:3, 353-364.
- Levinas, E. (1969), *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- MacCormick, N. (2005), *Rhetoric and the Rule of Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacCormick, N. (2009), *Practical Reason in Law and Morality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michelon, C. (2006), *Being Apart from Reasons: The Role of Reasons in Public and Private Moral Decision-Making*, Dodrecht: Springer.
- Mills, C.W. (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Murdoch, I. (2001), *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. (1984), *Man Alone with Himself*, trans. M. Faber, S. Lehmann & R.J. Hollingdale, London Penguin.
- Nussbaum, M. (1990), *Love's Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2006), *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press.

- Nussbaum, M. (2007a), *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2007b), 'On Moral Progress: A Response to Richard Rorty', *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 74, 939-60.
- Putnam, H. (2004), *Ethics without Ontology*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rudden, B. (1974), 'Courts and Codes in England, France and Soviet Russia', *Tulane Law Review*, 48, 1010-28.
- Said, E. (1985), *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Said, E. (2004), *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, London: Palgrave.
- Selznick, P. (2008), *A Humanist Science: Values and Ideals in Social Inquiry*, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Sennett, R. (1970), *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Serres, M. (1993), *The Natural Contract*, trans. E. MacArthur, W. Paulson, Michigan: Michigan University Press.
- Sontag, S. (2003), *Regarding the Pain of Others*, London Penguin.
- Veitch, S. (1999), *Moral Conflict and Legal Reasoning*, Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Veitch, S. (2007), *Law and Irresponsibility: On the Legitimation of Human Suffering*, London: Routledge Cavendish.
- Walker, N. (2008a), 'Beyond Boundary Disputes and Basic Grids: Mapping the Global Disorder of Normative Orders', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 6, 373-96.
- Walker, N. (2008b), 'Taking Constitutionalism Beyond the State', *Political Studies*, 56, 519-543.
- Weber, M. (2004), *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. R. Livingstone, New York: Hackett Publishing.
- Wedgwood, R. (2007), *The Nature of Normativity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weil, S. (2005), *An Anthology*, ed. S. Miles, London: Penguin Books.
- Williams, B. (2002), *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Williams, R. (2008), *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*, London: Continuum.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1970), *Zettel*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1980), *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell.