Hiding from love

The repressed insight in Freud's account of morality

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Abstract

Freud's account of morality is distinctive, and right, in focusing on unconscious, emotionalised conflict, and specifically on the repression of love as the centre of moral life. However, Freud misunderstands love in drive-terms and confuses conscience with the superego. Conscience is actually an immediate moral understanding, an interpersonal openness that the moral normativity of collectivity (values, ideals, etc.) represses. Thus, conscience is the repressed unconscious of the superego, and 'morality' not one thing, but a living contradiction. I detail how bad conscience differs from superego guilt, how destructive emotions (e.g., jealousy) are in themselves moralised repressions of love, and how Freud's officially amoral, drive-based accounts of the Oedipus complex and the installation of the superego break down, but can be understood if reconceptualised in the terms I propose. I also elucidate the concrete sense in which openness and love can be conceived as the very heart of moral understanding.

Keywords

morality, love, openness, repression, conscience, superego, guilt, emotions, Oedipus complex, collectivity

1. The superego and its other

Freud accepts the traditional view of morality as a set of norms/ideals that constrain or redirect our supposedly natural egocentric inclinations. Freud's version, where norms are enforced by the 'superego' against sexual and aggressive 'drives' housed in 'the id' poses a sceptical, naturalising challenge to the idealising-intellectualising tendency of traditional ethics, which sees moral norms not as mere social impositions, but as authored by Reason and/or God. Against this, Freud presents conscience as "an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society", its "voice" the inner echo of parental voices and the clamour of "public opinion" (SE 14:96). Naturalistic views of morality are standard today. Freud is distinctive in focusing on how moral norms come to *concern* the child at all, and consequently on the intimate dynamics of family-life, seen in terms of destructive inner conflicts which morality both regulates and perpetuates. Morality is a socially necessary but cruel system of internalised repression rather than, even ideally, a satisfying development of capacities for moral reasoning and virtuous character. Its core workings are unconscious, its rigid demands not the product of reason but a primitive way of managing libidinal deadlocks, and its 'reward': madness for some, and for the majority, general discontent and widely ramified cultural pathologies born of an obscure, mostly unconscious sense of guilt.[1]

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[1] Three central Freud-texts here are (1923), (1930) and (1933, 57–80); see also (1913), (1914), (1921), (1924) etc. Barnett (2007), Church (1991) and Roth (2001) are recent sympathetic readings of Freud on morality. On

A bleak picture! A common response is to think that Freud exaggerated; at best, his description might be accurate for individual pathology and particularly vicious versions of collective morality – after all, he lived in repressive Victorian times (cp. Lear 2015, 190–7). For many psychoanalysts, making 'rigid', 'punitive', 'archaic' superegos more 'realistic', 'humane' and 'mature' is a central goal of therapy,[2] and philosophers revise Freud's theory to allow for a 'rational superego', i.e. for moral reasoning rather than mere blind obedience in our response to socially sanctioned norms.[3] Theorists make the picture of moral development friendlier and (they believe) more realistic by stressing our natural inclination to sociability ('attachment') against Freud's idea of the amorally egocentric child, the pre-oedipal relationship to the nurturing caregiver(s) over the hostile oedipal rivalry that transfixed Freud, and the role in moral education of positive ideals and encouragements to identification (the aspirational 'ego ideal', even a 'loving superego') over threats and prohibitions.[4]

I propose something different. A broadly 'Freudian' focus on unconscious, emotionalised conflict is urgently needed, lest philosophical ethics remain stuck in the back-and-forth between equally naive rationalisms and sentimentalisms. Freud's account of ethics is seriously confused, however, his notion of childish amorality being a case in point (more on that below). But making it more 'reasonable' or otherwise 'positive' obscures the crucial insight he points to concerning the destructiveness of everyday collective morality, where we pressure others and ourselves into submitting to depersonalising decrees about how one 'must' think and behave. This isn't merely irrational or too harsh, but a deeply destructive falsification of life. That comes into full view, however, only in contrast to the wholly other, interpersonal moral understanding that I will call *conscience*, which collective moralism, i.e. the superego, attempts to *repress*. Morality is a thing much more fundamental *and* more terrible than either idealists or cynics ever suspect, because it isn't really one thing at all, but a living contradiction, comprised of our impossible attempts to deny and destroy the openness between us which conscience calls us to welcome. – Freud never says anything like this. Paradoxically, he sees the destructiveness of collective moralism, but not what it's ultimately destructive of. The basic defect of his account is that he replaces conscience with its false double, the superego, and this is intimately connected with his confused view of love. His core idea that human life is a drama centred on *love and its repression* is right, but he misunderstands its meaning.

Others, too, have criticised Freud for not distinguishing 'conscience' from 'superego',[5] and many have insisted, using different terms, that there are "two quite distinct types of morality" (Reddish 2014,

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individual/cultural symptoms of superego-guilt, see Bergler (1952), Carroll (1985), Wurmser (2000), Žižek (2005).

[2] E.g., Grotstein (2004), Jacobsen (1964), Kernberg (1976), Strachey (1934), Sedlak (2016).

[3] Velleman (2006); cp. Deigh (2006), Scheffler (1992a) and (1992b).

[4] E.g., Bieber (1972), Brickman (1983), Cottingham (1998), Dilman (2005), Gillman (1982), Harcourt (2015), Holder (1982), Holmes (2011), Lacewing (2008) and (2014), Lear (2000) and (2015, 211–4), Schafer (1960), Schecter (1979).

[5] E.g., Carveth (2013), Reiner (2009), Sagan (1988), Symington (2004). Lacanians don't speak of conscience, but they too project an ethics "not subject to the logic of the superego" (Zupančič 2000, 160; cp. Kesel 2009, Neill 2011, Žižek 2005).

1).[6] Indeed, something like that idea motivates the pervasive wish to 'improve' the superego, moving towards 'mature' morality. But the decisive question is how one conceives this contrast. Is the superego a primitive form of conscience, say, or a repressive reaction-formation against it, as I propose? Once the basic structure of motivations constituting the superego is clearly seen, I think 'improving' it will seem as appealing as a bigger cell in prison when compared to freedom. Hopefully, my account also indicates why morality has, basically, nothing to do with being *reasonable*, and why there's no need for an "independent faculty of normative judgement, located in the ego" that would "subject conscience to judgement".[7]

In my view, 'conscience' refers to one's personal moral understanding of one's relation to the other person, as it appears when one is tempted to go against it by somehow closing oneself to the other. If, seeing your need, I simply help, without reservations or ulterior motives, we wouldn't speak of 'conscience', yet the bad conscience that pricks me if I let you down expresses the same responsive openness that in the other case made me simply help. This openness is, very concretely, our 'moral sense'; the sense one person makes of another and of their encounter because she *senses* how it is with the other, responds to him in an immediate way that precedes inferences and reasoning. Thus, your sadness moves me in compassion; your gentleness warms me and makes me glad; your indifference chills me. These aren't mere passive reactions, but active forms of understanding and being with the other; in openness I enter your gentleness and sadness, but I'm closed out by your indifference. This openness is always-already-and-inescapably-there, insofar as any sense we make of what transpires between us presupposes and expresses it – if only, often, in the form of our destructively repressing it. This is simply how we relate to and understand each other.[8] This interpersonal understanding is itself *moral*, rather than merely psychological, insofar as feelings and judgements which are 'moral' in a narrower, often moralistic, sense (e.g., shame and guilt) remain dependent on it for their moral significance. If someone claimed to understand he'd done wrong in brutally beating someone, yet in his response to his victim showed no compassionate understanding of *her*, felt no chill as he thought of what he'd done, his supposed 'understanding' would be morally empty.[9]

However, this inseparability of conscience and interpersonal understanding is obscured precisely insofar as conscience is confused with the guilt- and shame-inducing superego, which happens in everyday life before being echoed by theorists like Freud. The slaveholder's sense that he's duty-bound to keep slaves in their place, the guilt and shame he might feel for being 'too soft' on them, certainly don't express the same understanding as his compassion with the grief of the slave-mother whose child he just sold down the river. On the contrary, these destructive moralistic feelings, and the values, ideals and 'moral reasons' that correspond to them on the 'intellectual' side, function to

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[6] Novick and Novick (2004) distinguish 'closed-system' from 'open-system' superegos; Kleinians 'paranoid-schizoid, persecutory' from 'depressive, reparative' guilt (cp. Alford 2006, Grinberg 1964, Segal 2002), etc.

[7] Velleman (2006, 149); Britton (2003, 101). Cp. Alexander (1925), Gray (2005), Milrod (2002).

[8] This isn't an empirical claim but a philosophical remark concerning the space of human intelligibility as such, within which any meaningful empirical testing must move (cp. Backström 2017).

[9] Gaita (2004, 43–63) underlines this point. Levinas (1969) and Løgstrup (1997) also make the concrete relation to the other person basic, whereas most ethics proceeds as though others gained moral significance only in relation to *my* values (cp. Backström 2015, Nykänen 2005).

repress the slaveholder's interpersonal moral understanding, hardening him against the slave and against his own heartfelt understanding of her. Thus, in identifying with his collective belonging, he identifies with his superego and represses his conscience. Conscience is the repressed unconscious of the superego.[10]

This doesn't mean that human beings are naturally good, and only get ruined by an evil society. Society exists only through/as the way individuals relate to each other and themselves, and the evil I do is indeed mine; I make it mine in identifying with 'my station' and its evil duties. That is: I close myself to those I make my victims, but because it's impossible to *simply ignore* others (to simply *stop* one's compassion, etc.), closing oneself necessitates, as its other side, a constellation of collectively enabled, destructive identifications and projections. Thus, I see my victim by turns as dangerous and contemptible, disgusting and attractive, pitiable and having himself to blame, and my view of myself and the collective I identify with is correspondingly ambivalent; e.g., I see 'us' as superior to 'them' *and* as defenceless against their aggression. A fruitful ethics needs to understand precisely the intra- and interpersonal emotional dynamics at stake in such conflicting, self-obfuscating identifications/projections. And this means understanding how, starting in the nursery, love is repressed and relationships are depersonalised.

2. Jealous Oedipus: repressing love through moralised emotion

The focus on life as structured and deformed by repression – i.e., by the unconscious created by our desperate need to keep ourselves unaware of what troubles us – is, Freud says, "the corner-stone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests" (SE 14:16).[11] And Freud always relates repression to love; repression is the manifestation of an "incapacity for loving" (SE 7:267), and "every psycho-analytic treatment is an attempt at liberating repressed love" (SE 9:90). In other words, what we suffer from is love-trouble. Alas, this trouble infects Freud's various statements about the matter, too, turning 'love' (*'Liebe'*) into a symptom and agent of confusion in his text, a sign whose meaning is perpetually changing and slipping away. Unsurprisingly, theorisations of love are (de)formed by one's personal wishful and fearful fantasies about love; cynical, romantic, sentimental, etc. You may wear the theorist's hat, but the head and heart under it are your own.

In Freud's earlier texts, 'love' is supposed to mean 'libido', that is, sexuality understood as a 'drive' composed of 'component drives', originating in somatic 'erotogenic zones' and variously sublimated and displaced (Freud 1905). Then, in re-hauling his drive-theory and introducing the controversial 'death drive', Freud also gives 'love' a new, broader signification (Freud 1920; cp. Lear 2003, 157ff.).

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[10] This general perspective on ethics, focusing on our difficulties with openness to the other and our destructive responses to it, is developed at length in Backström (2007), following Nykänen (2002). Cp. Backström and Nykänen (2016a) and (2016b).

[11] By 'repression' (*Verdrängung*), Freud sometimes means a specific defence in contrast to others, but he mostly uses the word generically, as I do, covering an open-ended range of defensive strategies (cp. SE 20:163–4; Boag 2012). Freud's discussions of repression are inadequate precisely because he overlooks that *what* is ultimately repressed is conscience. As Symington says, "We cannot do evil ... and know it. We fashion the unconscious so as not to know it" (2004, 70; cp. Backström 2014b, Nykänen 2009).

Instead of reducing love to sexuality, sexuality now becomes an aspect of love understood as a general life-force, Eros, striving "to establish ever greater unities ... to bind together", while the death drive aims "to undo connections and so to destroy things" (SE 23:148; cp. 21:122). Freud's later drive-conception is notoriously speculative and obscure; we'll return to its problems. His earlier reduction of love to libido was just as problematic, however; in fact, mere theoretical fantasy. Had Freud actually thought about love as reductively as he pretended to, he couldn't have made any sense of his clinical material.

The best illustration is Freud's depiction of the Oedipus complex. The breakdown of his libidinal account of it reveals the general impossibility of conceiving morality as, most basically, the imposition of norms on amoral 'nature'. Freud officially holds that morality enters the inner world of the previously amoral child only through the installation of the superego, which ends the oedipal phase, making the superego "the direct heir of the Oedipus complex" (SE 19:167; cp. 19:28–39, 173–9). The oedipal constellation itself is supposedly a purely libidinal, amorally sexual-emotional affair (including its aggressive aspects). But Freud's actual descriptions reveal something altogether different; a drama of terrible tensions and difficulties between family-members, driven by jealous rivalry which arises because those involved both love *and* mistrust each other. The oedipal child, Freud says, proceeds as though the parents, primarily the parent of the opposite sex, should by rights be devoted to it exclusively, and regards anything contradicting this as proof of "unfaithfulness" (SE 11:171; cp. SE 16:332–4; 19:173–9; 22:118–135, etc.). Pleasure, which Freud claims sexuality, and so the whole libidinal drama, is ultimately about, isn't at stake, but love; love *repressively misrepresented* as preference and possession, where the value of pleasures given is inextricable from their being perceived as tokens of privileged status. The oedipal drama, then, isn't about sexuality but about love-trouble – or, as one might also say: human sexuality, that trouble-ridden thing, is created by the presence of love and love-trouble (Backström 2014a).

The critical point isn't limited to sexuality, but concerns any attempt to understand interpersonal dynamics in drive-terms, that is, taking the individual's private/anonymous urges and needs as primary, with the other person entering only derivatively, as a contingent provider of satisfactions. Drives, Freud says, become attached to people – "objects" – "only in consequence of [the object] being peculiarly suited to make satisfaction possible" (SE 14:122; cp. 7:147–9). But his own descriptions show that the oedipal drama turns precisely around one's troubled relation to the other person; that relationship determines *what* one finds satisfying or frustrating (cp. SE 19:176). Unlike Fairbairn (1994), I'm not asserting the primacy of the 'object' over the 'drive'; those are strictly correlative concepts, the 'object' being what the 'drive' focuses on. The primary thing is the actual relationship to *the other person*. Drive-objects are formed as repressive responses to love-trouble in that relationship and function, like the values, ideals etc. to which they're typically tied, to repress conscience (which calls one to love). Love-trouble means closing oneself to the other, reducing her, in fantasy, to a certain *kind* of person. In one's irritation or excitement, say, one feels 'driven' towards, or away from, this irritating or exciting 'object' to which one's own difficulty in being open with the other reduces her. By contrast, there's nothing *driven* (compulsive) or objectifying in love.[12]

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[12] Freud's later drive-conception might *seem* to mark "the movement from a closed to an open psyche" (Lear 2003, 166), with Eros conceptualised as a *non*-egocentric/reductive/destructive drive, but conceiving love in drive-terms still focuses on the singular subject; Eros becomes "the quasi-instinctual force by which ... the psyche grabs hold of meaning to organize itself [...in] ever more diverse communications with itself and with

Love-trouble is *moral* trouble because it concerns the relation to the other person. Jealousy, envy, hatred and the related emotions and fantasies that constitute the oedipal drama are in themselves morally defined responses. They aren't morally *good*, but they manifest, however confusedly and wilfully, an accusing sense of entitlement, of one's rightful position vis-à-vis others; Freud speaks of "romances of revenge and exoneration" (Masson 1985, 318). Prior to any external superego-judgment, this accusatory moralism is constitutive of what the jealous (etc.) child *feels*. Jealousy and the other oedipal attitudes are morally charged because they are *demands raised in the name of love* (not: *out of* love).

The oedipal boy doesn't just want the presence of mother and isn't resentful towards father simply for being the cause of her absence. He is jealous because he sees that mother cares about father, loves him. In his jealous eyes, *that* is the betrayal. His demand for devotion is essentially triangular and comparative; he demands that mother *exclude* father in favour of him. He might be indifferent or irritated with mother as long as they're alone, but once father enters, he suddenly cannot be without her. Thus, the rival's presence, self-deceptively presented and felt in jealousy as simply a hateful threat, is actually what makes the supposedly loved person 'lovable' to the jealous. The jealous demand for devotion doesn't indicate strength of love, and even where there's a strong wish to be with the other also in the rival's absence, jealousy reveals a *distrust* of the love between oneself and the other. If two people love wholeheartedly, with no secret reservations and anxieties between them, a third person cannot become a 'rival' any more than buyers can exist in the absence of sellers.

However, while the jealous demand for devotion isn't an expression of wholehearted love, it is *related* to love. A child who felt no love, but was simply the biological discharge-seeking machine Freud claims children originally are (SE 22:62), would simply use people for his own ends. He wouldn't feel jealous, for he wouldn't care what happened between his parents, unless it directly impinged on his private interests. He couldn't feel excluded from their love because he wouldn't perceive it as *love* but only as, say, 'an opportunity to snatch a cookie while they're occupied with each other'. Actual children aren't like that; like adults, they love, but also find it difficult to love, i.e., are susceptible to jealousy and myriad other emotional responses in which love is played on and perverted by fearful, destructive egocentricity. Egocentricity isn't amorality, but a repression of love in which one indulges, as no amoral creature could, feelings of rage and self-pity over fantasised betrayals by others whom one claims to love, but destructively attacks in one's self-pitying rage, thereby repressing the love one does *also* feel.[13]

The jealous boy presents himself, both to mother and to himself, as having been abandoned by her and accuses her, as Freud says, of "lack of love" (SE 22:122). The accusation is fraudulent; even if mother really acted lovelessly, the jealous child's accusing attitude is itself loveless. Compare the forlorn, heartbreaking expression of a child who genuinely feels abandoned by a parent, with the simultaneously self-pitying and tyrannical demeanour of a jealous child, furiously protesting if the

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the world at large" (2003, 177–8). Here, the psyche is open to itself and 'its' world, not to the other person – which is what *love* is all about, and why it's the very heart of moral understanding.

[13] I'm not making empirical claims here (or, I hope, anywhere else in my argument), but clarifying the immanent connections of meaning between various motives and attitudes; connections we typically deny in indulging these very attitudes.

parent shows interest in others. No difference could be greater! With a heartfelt sense of abandonment comes anguish, but no *demand*. The abandoned child's look is heartbreaking precisely because it doesn't try to *force* the parent to stay; it simply longs for the parent, suffers defencelessly from her callousness. The jealous child appeals to this very defencelessness, makes a *show* of it, and parents often play along; "Those sad, innocent puppy eyes, I just couldn't say no!" Alas, that isn't love speaking, and there's nothing innocent about this game of mutual moralistic-sentimental manipulation. The jealous demand makes it clear that unless you yield, you'll be sorry, but the threat is *moralised*. It doesn't say: "If you leave, I'll break your favourite vase", but rather: "Look how *hurt* I would be by your leaving; think of how sorry, how *guilty* that would make you feel!"

The jealous child doesn't only accuse the parent, trying to make her feel guilty; he also feels guilty himself. Because of the repressed love in jealousy and other egocentric-destructive responses, they have a self-accusing aspect; they are essentially *guilty* feelings. The oedipal boy doesn't only want, egocentrically, to have mother's total devotion; he also loves her, and so wants to see her happy. And he loves and cares for his father, too, however intensely he may *also* hate him as a rival. Indeed, hatred is itself a repressed form of love; its perversely insatiable concern with the hated other, with whom one *claims* to want nothing to do, arises as one's loving concern for the other, which cannot be simply abolished, is repressively turned into a destructive persecuting-and-being-persecuted-by-him.[14] The presence of love means that, if the jealous boy gets mother to neglect father in preference to him, his triumph will be mixed with guilt for having made both father and mother sad by forcing himself between them and ruining the moment of love between them (to repeat: if he didn't perceive this love, he wouldn't feel *jealous*). The destruction he wrought makes the boy sad, gives him bad conscience. If he allowed himself to simply perceive what his bad conscience shows him, to feel it without repressing it, he would feel no guilt-ridden jealousy or triumph, but wholehearted love in the form of a longing for forgiveness and reunion with both his parents, where *no-one* would be excluded. – If this sounds like a naively idyllic notion, consider a situation where a jealous boy's 'death-wish' is seemingly 'granted', and father actually goes away for good; this will certainly not make the boy happy, but deeply unhappy and guilt-ridden, and he will wish for nothing more than to have father back.

Jealousy, like other egocentric-destructive responses, is attended by bad conscience, but one can persist in jealousy only by repressing this bad conscience, this longing for lovingly reuniting with those one jealously turned against. The repression leaves one feeling guilty, but not, consciously, for the *jealousy*, which one presents, *in* feeling it, as a justified response to the other's treason. Instead, one feels guilty for other things, proxies, and one may not feel overtly guilty at all, but rather one's guilt comes out in self-punishing behaviour, etc. Thus, the 'unconscious sense of guilt' with its symptomatic displacements, which Freud always emphasised (cp. Johnston 2013, 88–101), is itself a repression of love, that is, of conscience.

The crucial point is that this 'primal repression' of love's bad conscience is inherent in jealousy and other egocentric-destructive responses; it is part of having/feeling them at all. This is why triumph over a rival and other 'good' feelings engendered by destructive, self-centred schemes and fantasies never feel simply good, but always also terrible, intense and even euphoric as they may be. The repression of love, the self-obfuscation or splitting-of-oneself, is part of the feeling itself. Here, then,

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[14] Cp. Cordner (2002, 147–149), Løgstrup (1997, 32–35), Sartre (1965).

repression doesn't work according to Freud's schema, where "drive-impulses" undergo repression, "following the commands of [the] super-ego [because they] come into conflict with the subject's cultural and ethical ideas" – which makes that "the formation of an ideal ... the conditioning factor of repression" (SE 14:93–4; 19:150; cp. 20:29, 2:268–9). While one may indeed repress awareness of one's jealousy because one has internalised a moral prohibition against jealousy (an ideal of being a non-jealous person), the primary repression happens already *in* the jealous response itself: to feel jealous *is* to repress the very love in the name of which one raises one's jealous demands. Hence, jealousy and other egocentric-destructive reactions can be characterised as *essentially misfelt/misrecognised responses*. One cannot be clear about them *in* having them; having them means misrepresenting to oneself the character of the relation to the other person they manifest.[15] Thus, jealousy involves misrepresenting oneself as loving the person one blackmails with one's jealous demands and confusing love, which is between 'you' and 'me', with preference, i.e. rejection of a third party (without this confusion, there'd be no jealousy). Egocentric/destructive responses repress both the actual lovelessness of one's own response *and* the love that nonetheless also underlies it. Thus, in one's hatred one feels not loveless, but justified by the *other's* supposed lovelessness ("After what she did to me..."), and one refuses to acknowledge the love one still also feels for her (see above).

In my view, our moral difficulties generally are structured by egocentric-destructive responses; they involve a repression of love and conscience and are constitutively self-misrepresentations. This also means that love and destructiveness aren't two equiprimordial 'drives', as Freud imagines (SE 21:122). Rather, the myriad forms of our destructiveness are repressive responses to love, parasitic on the very relation to the other they desperately, impossibly, want to destroy. Reik's claim that "Love is in its essential nature an emotional reaction-formation to envy, possessiveness, and hostility" (2002, 66), gets it exactly the wrong way round.

3. The superego's empty threat

Jealousy is not a one-man-show. Like our 'inner' life generally, it's a response within an evolving relationship to others, and their responses to us change the field, the sense, of our further responses. If others didn't confuse the jealous child's manipulations with love but clearly saw them for what they are, they'd lose their effectiveness, appearing merely sad. The confusion is self-deceptive; manipulation, unlike simple deception, plays on the manipulated person's wish to go along with the manipulation.[16] Parents are taken in by their manipulative children not because they're stupid, but because they themselves are playing the same manipulative game. Freud tends to depict the oedipal constellation from the child's point of view, but parents who feel rejected by a child in favour of the other parent are as prone as the child to jealousy, and if the jealous boy feels 'special' in having mother privilege him, mother feels 'special' in seeing the boy insistently demanding her for himself. Neither of them wants to give up the narcissistic satisfactions of their self-deceptive game. And similar games are everywhere; think of how easily telling someone something trivial gains an aura of

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[15] Cp. Johnston (2013), Nykänen (2009), Warner (1986, and 1982).

[16] Selling sugar-pills as painkillers is simple deception; taking the pills and feeling the pain subside 'as a result' is self-deceptive self-manipulation; pill-merchants who count on this response are engaged in manipulation.

importance if presented as a *secret*; lowering my voice, I say "I've told no-one else", and you feel flattered to be let in on this, in contrast to all those excluded. The Mother-Child-Father triangle doesn't exist in a vacuum, and siblings, relatives, friends, and others are drawn into and actively play along in the games of mutual jealousy, envy, preferences, sympathies, and other forms of egocentrically, distrustfully comparing attitudes, where one is judged by others and lowered or raised in their affection and esteem relative to others, just as one in turn judges them.

Let's now consider how the 'superego' – the culturally variable constellations of more narrowly moral values and norms with their corresponding patterns of guilt and shame that children internalise – fits into this web of deformed relationships. Freud claims that "the destruction of the Oedipus complex is brought about by the threat of castration"; faced with threatened punishment, the child eventually gives up its parent(s) as object(s) of jealous sexual fantasies of possessing mother/father and instead identifies with them in their role as authorities prohibiting this very possession; "The authority of … the parents is introjected into the ego, and there … forms the nucleus of the super-ego" (SE 19:176–7; cp. 19:28–39). But fear of threatened punishment (Freud understands castration literally; we needn't) cannot create moral understanding, and 'introjection' changes nothing here. Introjecting a frightening, punitive adult creates a frightening, punitive 'internal object' that appears in the child's anxieties and nightmares, but it doesn't make it feel the least *guilty* (cp. Harcourt 2007, Jones 1966). Guilt-feelings arise only where punishment is administered in the name of love, or, rather, only then can aggressive reprisal be experienced as *punishment*. Insofar as adults could simply mistreat children, with nothing like affection between them, children would fight for their survival without moral scruples, as though confronted by some terrible machine. Freud himself finally admits this when, after trying unsuccessfully to explain the origin of the superego only in terms of aggression turned back on the child's self (SE 21:123–30), he acknowledges the ineliminable part "played by love in the origin of conscience [i.e. the superego]" (SE 21:132). As he says, only "the experience of being loved" can turn aggression into guilt (SE 21:130, fn).[17]

The superego's basic motive force is, Freud says, fear of "loss of the parents' love" (SE 21:124–5). Its "pangs of conscience" are really stabs of this internalised fear, while in heeding superego demands one "expects to be rewarded by receiving more love from it", and "consciousness of deserving this love is felt … as pride" (SE 23:117). This description is simultaneously both accurate and confused, because it characterises the destructive dynamics at issue in the same repressively confused terms used by those who submit others and themselves to it.[18] The question we should ask is how *love* could be withdrawn, as opposed to repressed? Certainly, favoured status can be withdrawn, out of some motive or capriciously. But love isn't favouritism or conditionality. Anyone who says "I'll love you *if* you do *xyz*" isn't speaking the language of love. In turning my supposed 'love' into a weapon of extortion, I only show that I *don't* love you. In other words, Freud hangs everything on an empty threat; the threat of taking away what the threat itself reveals isn't there, or is only there in repressed form, as *refused*.

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[17] Cp. SE 21:124–133. Many commentators overlook the centrality of love in Freud's account of superego-formation (e.g. Church 1991, Symington 2004), and Freud himself sometimes appears to deny it (e.g., SE 22:211).

[18] Even writers critical of Freud's reductive view of love accept the loss-of-love idea; e.g., Suttie (1963, 102) and Harcourt (2007, 143).

Alas, Freud's conception seems plausible because we constantly threaten each other in this way, to terrible effect. This essentially empty threat is more powerful than all 'real' threats combined. Hurt looks and other manipulative strategies of moralised-emotionalised blackmail imply that if you want to be 'loved', you have to make yourself 'lovable'; change yourself to fit *my* preferences, wishes, needs. However, insofar as the situation is moralised, I don't present these as simply mine, but as about you meeting shared expectations and values; "*No-one* accepts a person who acts like you!" In this moralistic depersonalisation one enlists the support of others against the person one threatens, making her feel isolated and powerless. But depersonalisation isn't primarily driven by strategic concerns; the basic point is that in making egocentric demands one refuses to be open, to address the other simply as oneself, 'I' to 'you', and this *means* that one starts speaking in general terms, about what 'one' – perhaps as 'a person in my position, after the kind of thing you did' – can and cannot do, think, understand, etc. This depersonalised mode of address doesn't change one's basically egocentric-manipulative orientation, but manifests it. To repeat: in rejecting you because you don't meet my expectations, whether shared with 'everybody' or with no-one, I show that I refuse to love you, not that you're 'unlovable'.

Does loving someone then mean uncritically accepting abuse and evil from them? No. Love rejects evil unconditionally, but it doesn't reject *the other* even when she does evil. Rather, evil prevents love's realisation insofar as, in doing evil, the *evil-doer* refuses to give or receive love. In speaking to someone's conscience in love's sense, one calls her back to herself and to the one(s) she deserted. By contrast with superego-voices, there's no moralistic demand or threat, and no argument, just a simple appeal: "Don't you see what you're doing?" It's an appeal without power, but precisely this freedom from – *not*: mere lack of – power makes it in a way stronger than any power. Think, again, of the appeal in the forlorn child's face; in not attempting to manipulate and force the other, but leaving them free, it opens them to the question of their own freedom and responsibility. This breaks their heart open – or drives them mad, if they refuse the opening.

In succumbing to parental threats of 'loss of love', the child feels ashamed or guilty; the empty threat becomes 'real', effective, through those emotional responses. They contrast with two other possibilities. A child might react amorally, obeying without shame or guilt, simply to avoid the external consequences of parental disapproval, or it might be 'unable' to repress its love and so reacts to parental shaming/guilt-loading with sadness and anguish, perhaps anger. The child who, instead, represses its love in succumbing to shame/guilt, turns on its own spontaneous expressions, anxiously trying to remake itself in the image of 'the lovable child' projected by the parents' disapproval of the real one; thus arises the ego-ideal. The tragedy is that while the child longs for love, by falsifying itself it gets only *approval*. Adam Smith thought we have an "original desire to please, and ... original aversion to offend our brethren" (1976, 116), and that this is the foundation of morality, but the desire to please isn't original; it's what our longing for love gets perverted into insofar as we turn it down. 'Society' doesn't do this to us; rather, society in its destructive aspects is constituted and perpetuated by our collectively doing it to ourselves. The jealous child, too, with its hurt looks and angry protests, threatens the parent with 'withdrawing its love', claiming the right to punish the faithless parent for 'withdrawing her love first'. Indeed, every move in our collective threatening-game is presented as justified by the lovelessness of the other. Thus, the punitive mother presents herself as *punishing* her child for his naughtiness; that is, for acting selfishly, not caring about her or others.

The paradigmatic superego responses shame and guilt suffuse the threatening-game. These responses are in some ways quite different. Most obviously, shame focuses on one's weakness/ineptness in not measuring up to some ideal, i.e., to the expectations of those whose rejection one fears, guilt on the harm one has supposedly done them; not one's impotence but the destructive use made of one's power makes one feel guilty (thus, if A made B cry, A feels guilty for her meanness, her power to hurt, while B feels ashamed for his weakness). But the differences between shame and guilt arise from a deeper similarity. In both cases one fears social rejection and (so) loss of self-esteem; one feels an intolerably *bad* person. This is obvious in shame, and it means that, even where my shame results from my mistreating you in what I regard as a shameful way, my thoughts aren't primarily with you in your suffering; rather, I'm preoccupied with the misfortune I've brought on myself (*I* have lost face). This narcissism in the *form* of one's moral concern makes shame-morality a terrible thing even where the particular values ('contents') it honours are in some ways desirable. A murderer who feels *ashamed* of his deed only perpetuates the blindness to his victim, and to himself, it revealed.[19]

It might seem, though, that a murderer *should* definitely feel guilty. We shouldn't confuse guilt-feelings with bad conscience, however; the former are actually a repression of the latter, and share shame's self-loathing self-centredness. Obviously, a repentant wrongdoer knows he's guilty in the plain sense of having done someone wrong. But the more he opens up to the person he wronged, i.e., the more he allows himself to feel love for her – that love is *what* he feels in his bad conscience, what it calls him to – the less will he be tormented by guilt-feelings, which are feelings focusing, like shame, on one's own (supposed) badness. The primary expression of bad conscience is the longing to find those one wronged, ask their forgiveness and be reconciled with them. Here, one isn't dominated by the egocentric worry over others withdrawing their 'love', i.e. their favour. Instead, there's a pained realisation that, by hurting, ignoring or manipulating the other, one has *oneself* failed in love for *them*. This realisation isn't intellectual, but manifests one's desire to open up to the other in love again. The sense of having closed oneself to the other and being still estranged from them is painful; the more one loves, the clearer and deeper is the pain. But since one now wholeheartedly seeks reconciliation and sees the other and oneself in one's relation to them in the light of love, one's consciousness of estrangement – unlike guilt and shame, but like grief or longing for an absent friend – doesn't feel *simply* bad (cp. Nykänen 2014).[20]

The guilt- and shame-inducing superego's function is, as Freud says, *hostile surveillance*; one feels watched and condemned by others (SE 21:136; cp. SE 22:59). The repression and displacement of conscience by the superego consists precisely, as Nykänen (2014) demonstrates, in this reversal whereby, instead of actively opening oneself in love to the person one wronged, one assumes the passive position of 'one judged by others'. These others needn't be real people, although at first they

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[19] Clearly, people *can* feel ashamed even for murder; confusion is confused, but one can *be* confused. Similarly, philosophers regularly overlook or explicitly deny the narcissism of shame, even praising it as "the prime moral sentiment of evolved morality, of morality beyond the superego" (Wollheim 1986, 220).

[20] Some may feel that the 'bad conscience' I contrast with self-centred guiltiness is actually guilt in the *proper* sense of the word. Since I'm not legislating about the use of words, but trying to characterise two different moral orientations, I wouldn't object to this, if my description of the contrast and the perspective I try to open up (of which this contrast is part), is otherwise accepted. However, I find it hard to imagine why, after taking all that *that* entails onboard, one would still want to insist on speaking of 'guilt' here.

were that for the child; they may be imagined, idealised others, representatives of impersonal moral values. Philosophers usually debate whether the moral judgement one feels subject to is 'autonomous' (impersonal) or 'heteronomous' (tied to an audience of specific others), but from love's perspective that difference is irrelevant; however the judging 'one' is further specified, the self-objectifying, judgemental perspective contrasts with the bad conscience of love, where one doesn't feel observed and condemned, but opened to and united with the other in love. Furthermore, even in its most instinctive and infantile forms, comparing oneself with more or less 'lovable' (favoured) others involves a depersonalising self-objectification; the oedipal boy already implicitly wonders "What does he (the rival) have that I lack, that makes mother prefer him?" Apparently, some 'thing', some quality or ingredient, *makes* one 'lovable' (valuable); the ego-ideal is built around the core fantasy of acquiring this 'thing', this value, thereby *forcing* others to 'love' (value) one. 'Autonomy' is the fantasy of *making oneself valuable* by fashioning oneself into an object that others 'must' value by a kind of impersonal, ideal necessity.

Some may find linking bad conscience to forgiveness cheap; saying "I'm sorry" might make one feel good, but what counts is making reparations and bettering one's ways. The objection is misguided. Asking for forgiveness isn't just *saying* "I'm sorry" and perhaps shedding some guilty tears. When spoken from the heart, "Please forgive me" is the unadorned expression of the longing to undo the distance and alienation between oneself and the other caused by oneself. One makes no claims, doesn't pressure the other to forgive or pretend that they are *obliged* to; one simply expresses the same longing of love expressed in the forlorn child's "Please don't go". And that longing will also be expressed in endeavours to change entrenched ways of acting, to repair what was broken, etc. Where the longing is absent, or rather repressed, as when guilt-feelings dominate and there's no forgiveness sought, reparation, too, will acquire a different, morally problematic character. Then, one will try to appease the guilt one feels for having *avoided* seeking forgiveness, compensating for it by 'doing good'. Think, e.g., of a woman forever 'paying' in the coin of kindness and self-abnegation to her husband for an affair she never dared confess and ask forgiveness for, because truthful confrontation with him frightens her.

4. Love: all freedom, no license

The main point I've been labouring is that our moral-psychological difficulties, in pathological and everyday forms, can be understood only in the light of the good possibility they repress, namely the wholeheartedness of love to which conscience calls us. That possibility is what we have difficulties *with*. Thus, both the pressure we often feel to lie and the terribleness of lying relate to the truthful, wholehearted contact the lie evades and represses. Love is the good that the various forms of human destructiveness, moralised or not, are destructive of.

But, it will be objected, can't people do terrible, as well as wonderful, things out of love? And isn't the "first desideratum" in any account of love therefore "to recognize that love comes in good and bad varieties", and to decide "which ideal sorts love into good and bad" (Harcourt 2017, 39)? Freud certainly thought so, and until we see the misconception underlying this view, it remains unclear how conscience in the sense of love could provide genuine moral understanding. The crucial point is that

so-called bad 'forms of love' aren't really forms of love, but attitudes that masquerade as love while actually repressing it. As I've stressed, terrible things are done *in the name* of love. No word is as abused as 'love'. To tell the real thing from the counterfeits one doesn't need an 'ideal', however, but the real thing itself. Someone who loves wholeheartedly won't be taken in by false protestations of 'love', while one who doesn't will use even the best ideals to rationalise the distrust, defensiveness and destructiveness which manifest their own lovelessness. "If someone has no ideals", Frankfurt says, "there is nothing that he cannot bring himself to do" (1999, 114). But it's precisely in the name of ideals, often loveless ideals of 'love', that the worst atrocities are committed.

It isn't merely that some ideal representations of love – those tied up with oppressive gender-roles, say – misrepresent love, but that any *representation* of love is itself a *repression* of love. Any ideal of love comes between the lovers, obstructing and perverting the openness between them. Loving someone means approaching them without preconceptions and demands, conscious or unconscious, regarding how one 'should' treat them or be treated by them, or what 'kind' of person oneself and they are, whereas ideals are precisely pieces of 'legislation' about these things. To love is to listen and speak, to touch and move, freely, unrestrictedly, guided only, and fully, by love's wholehearted desire to know and be known by the other, in every sense of word, and this includes the endless work of undoing the clogs of distrust and misunderstanding that always threaten to build up between us. Here, even the best ideals and the most positive expectations and 'narratives' are, ultimately, only hindrances.[21]

Certainly, without moral ideals, norms and prohibitions, social life, including intimate relationships, would descend into barbarism. But that's because there's so much lovelessness (jealousy, envy, etc.) between people, not because *love* must be regulated. Moral regulation by norms/ideals is like the police: necessary, given how heartless and irresponsible we often are, but also a symptom of the love-trouble they only precariously control. Clearly, insofar as things are *good* between people, no police surveillance is needed, and if it's still insisted on, that itself becomes a problem. The idea that, if left free, love *itself* might lead to abuse, is confused; abuse is excluded by the very dynamics of love's desire. If you love someone you also desire sexually, for instance, there's no need for you *also* to (say) 'respect' them to ensure your desire doesn't lead to violations, for when sexual arousal is lived in love, *what* you desire – that the other turn to you in the openness, the unguarded desire and joy, in which you turn to them – excludes every violation. What you're aroused by is the prospect of sexual communion, and if the other doesn't want that, it kills your arousal. Or rather, your arousal ceases where it would become, through the other's withdrawal, *merely your own, your private thing*. Thus, insofar as my desire to caress you expresses love, I won't go on if you don't want me to, because there will now *be* no place for me to go. You were the 'place', and you've withdrawn. By contrast, if my caress is loveless, i.e., if love is only present in repressed form, my response to your unwillingness may vary. If I wish to ingratiate myself with you, I'll anxiously stop and apologise, perhaps; if I feel sentimental and cuddly, or just horny, I might go on *because I want to* so much; indeed, in my egocentric arousal I may not even notice that you don't like what I'm doing. The more I give myself over to my sentimental or horny fantasising, the more I ignore *you*, on whose person I stage my fantasy (Backström 2014a).

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[21] Hence, the ubiquitous psychoanalytic talk of 'good objects' and 'good narratives' should be treated with caution.

Wholehearted love thus subverts the standard conception of the relation between desire and morality, which sees a person's desires, needs etc. as essentially egocentric and therefore amoral. On that conception, what I desire and experience as 'good for me' is compatible with the other's good only contingently, and so concern-for-the-other must be expressed through external moral regulation (through taboos, reasoning or in some other way). Even apparently 'positive' desires like the desire to relieve distress rooted in empathic identification, need moral regulating because they're still essentially egocentric and capricious. I might feel empathic towards A and B, but not C; my empathy for A might disregard his actual predicament (perhaps I wrongly see him as like myself), etc. This privatising conception of desire, shared by rationalists and sentimentalists, doesn't fit love's desire, however, which is *itself* the welcoming opening of oneself to the other. That's why, far from needing external moral regulation, it is the very movement of morality, of conscience. Conscience can reveal the moral destructiveness of both my private inclinations and the shared moral norms of my society not because it's some 'higher' form of subjectivity, whatever that would mean, but because it *is* my openness to the other person, the one my private or collectively sanctioned aims tempted me to violate – as I now clearly see, in the light of love that makes her presence real to me.[22] That light excludes all licentiousness/irresponsibility. Moral regulations, by contrast, always leave some room for it, within the limits they establish; thus, my obligation to respect your wealth is matched by your right to use it as you please, e.g., keeping it all while your neighbours starve.

Love is the longing for the other to be herself and oneself to be oneself, together. Thus, love is a longing for *reality*, "a spirit of truth ... which will not ... have anything to do with ... falsehood" (Weil 1978, 242); the very opposite of the blindly idealising credulity Freud and many others presents it as (SE 7:150; 295–6; 18:111–6). That view leads Freud to suggest that love itself can drive repression, as when a husband blinds himself to hateful aspects of his wife's person; on Freud's view, "precisely the intensity of his love ... would not allow his hatred ... to remain conscious" (SE 10:180–1). But it isn't out of love that the husband is hostile and represses his hostility; it's because he isn't prepared to love his wife wholeheartedly. He cannot bear to see her and his feelings for her truthfully, because that would mean opening things up between them; he'd have to change, to forgive and ask for forgiveness. Instead, he represses the problem, which means, correlatively, that he fabricates a false, idealised picture or narrative about their relationship. He may admit they have problems, but he'll misrepresent what they're about. Refusal of love is compatible with brutal frankness in acknowledging shortcomings in oneself and the other; one can admit to any kind of 'truth' *except* the truth that one refuses to love (not: cannot, but refuses to). And it isn't this truth as such that frightens one, but the prospect of love itself, of opening up to the other in forgiveness.

Love, then, is what is repressed, never what represses. When you find something amiss in the other's way of relating to you, or to someone else, the question of conscience in love is whether your own reaction expresses love – in which case what you react to is the other's closing herself to love – or is rather a way in which *you* close yourself to her, while projecting your guilt over this onto her, presenting her as 'harassing' or 'judging' you, say.[23] And you know what's what only by opening

[22] Huckleberry Finn is an exemplary case (Backström 2007, 240–8; 338–343). Many philosophers rightly criticise subjectivistic misconceptions of conscience, mistakenly thinking they're criticising conscience itself (cp. Feldman 2006).

[23] In actual cases, love and loveless motives will typically be mixed on both sides; I don't wish to deny this ambivalence but to understand what creates it, *what* is mixed.

yourself in love, as conscience calls you to, for opening up *means* letting go of your fearful hostility with its repressive/projective games, thus fully and lucidly feeling what is going on between you. There is then no 'moral question' left, only the longing to be and stay open. This is what the dissolution of moral difficulties looks like from the perspective of love (cp. Nykänen 2015). This dissolution doesn't tell you what to *do* in the situation, for instance how best to help someone in need. But the *moral* aspect of the difficulty consisted in your not really wanting to help. Perhaps the other disgusted you or provoked your envy, and so you instinctively made up justifications for not helping; "He doesn't deserve help", "He'll manage", etc. Opening up to the other dissolves the disgust/envy, and along with it the falsely moralised pseudo-problem of whether he 'deserves'/needs help, and you're finally able to look at the problem as a genuinely practical one of how best to help him.

A common objection to equating conscience with love is that two people loving each other isn't enough and that lovers may treat 'outsiders' indifferently – even viciously, if they feel their love threatened, so that "in the blindness of love, remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime", as Freud says (SE 18:113). But this, too, is misconceived. Unlike favouritism or devotion which indeed tend towards remorselessness against 'outsiders' – as do collective us/them-identifications generally, however wide in scope – love is non-excluding, even if, or, rather, precisely because, it's strictly personal. No extra moral demand to 'extend' the love one feels for one person to others is needed, because the very form of love's desire excludes all destructiveness, not just against one particular person ('the beloved'). Loving even one person wholeheartedly means opening *oneself*, i.e. shedding one's fearfully insistent egocentric demands, and this changes the spirit in which one approaches each person one meets; one now sees *each* other *as* other (Backström 2007, 229–316).

And, turning things around: whence derives the objector's certainty that everyone *should* be treated well and equally? How does one know, say, that the slaveholder's attitude to his slaves is evil? Isn't that because love shows one this in conscience, as one considers what it would mean to treat a loved human being as the slaveholder treats his slave? Repressing this understanding means repressing one's sense of the slaveholder's *callousness*, and this allows his attitude to appear justified, even perfectly reasonable – as it did to Aristotle, whose blindness to the evil of 'natural slavery' (cp. Cambiano 1987) wasn't due to any weakness in his rational powers, but to identification with his slaveholding culture. Aristotle's superego forbade him to see its evil. The social pressure internalised in the superego determines the limits allowed to reasoning rather than the reverse; it is 'rational' only in the sense that, speaking in the superego's depersonalising voice, we enlists reasoning as readily as emotional reactions for our repressive purposes. Reasoning doesn't tell ideologising rationalisation from moral understanding if one doesn't *want* it to. And if one wants to see the difference, no reasoning is needed. One doesn't perceive callousness as a result of arguments, and if one starts *arguing* the wrongness of slavery, one has already conceded too much, insofar as one admits, in principle, that the slaveholder might be right (if one doesn't admit that, one isn't really reasoning, merely rationalising).

5. The 'impossibility' of ethics

I have been radically critical of Freud's account of morality. However, my critique is itself Freudian in inspiration insofar as I understand moral difficulties in terms of love-trouble and repression. My criticism is that Freud doesn't see *how* love and repression are actually related, and how both can be properly understood only as essentially moral phenomena – just as, conversely, moral life itself can only be understood in terms of love and its repression.

Let me finally illustrate a crucial 'methodological' point about the study of ethics by briefly commenting on Freud's structural model of the psyche. That model doesn't model *the* structure of our minds, as Freud thinks, but is rather itself a symptom of real-life difficulties; a theoretical formulation of the *self-misrepresentation* belonging to destructive moral-existential orientations. The model reifies 'ego', 'id', and 'superego' as independent psychical 'agencies', but they're really only different stances (or 'voices') we assume as we address ourselves and others. It is *I* who speak in an impatiently horny voice ('id'), or in a prurient voice condemning horny desires as 'immoral' ('superego'). However, I thereby become a different kind of 'I' than I would be if I dared to confront the other openly; an 'I' for which the term 'ego' is quite apposite. The ego-centric attitude I assume is marked by irresponsible passivity, self-pity and hostility. Picturing myself as an innocent bystander caught in the middle of a conflict between the 'natural urges' I 'simply find welling up in myself' and the arduous moral demands for renunciation that 'society' imposes, I refuse to take responsibility for either my desire or my moral understanding. Freud's structural model doesn't *account* for this depersonalisation and flight from responsibility, from openly addressing the other in one's longing, sorrow or anger; it merely *echoes* it. The model is the self-obfuscating self-apology of the "poor ego" who often "cannot suppress a cry: 'Life is not easy!'" (SE 22:78).

What this brief discussion illustrates was implicit in all the discussions above; that the difficulty of doing ethics isn't primarily intellectual. The pictures we make of morality, including at the most abstract theoretical levels, are themselves implicated in our love-trouble, defended and rejected depending on what wishful and fearful fantasies we've unconsciously invested in them. This means that accounting for morality truthfully 'in theory' implies a kind of 'working-through' of one's own moral-existential difficulties and temptations; a sustained engagement precisely with what one most wants to avoid thinking about. If psychoanalysis is an 'impossible' profession, so is ethics, and essentially for the same reason.

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