

## So Much Fuss about Nothing

### The moral dynamics of the mind-body problem<sup>1</sup>

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#### 1. Introduction

‘Human consciousness’, Daniel Dennett writes, ‘is just about the last surviving mystery [...] a phenomenon that people don’t know how to think about — yet.’ (Dennett 1991, p. 21) Nevertheless, ‘thanks very little to progress in philosophy and very much to progress in science’ (Dennett 2006, p. 1) this ‘mystery’ is now, supposedly, on the verge of becoming disenchanted as Dennett understands himself to be professing a theory that ‘will trade mystery for the rudiments of scientific knowledge’ (Dennett 1991, p. 22).

This is, one should note, a quite specific way of understanding the nature of the *mystery* of the ‘mystery of mind/consciousness’. Or perhaps more importantly, it gives voice to a specific form of self-understanding in relation to the mystery. What Dennett seems to suggest is that the mystery of the mind is akin to the mystery of the construction of the great pyramids. Here, in the case of the pyramids, our ‘bafflement and wonder’ (Dennett 1991, p. 22) arises out of the perceived complexity, elaborateness, hardship etc. underpinning the construction of the pyramids, as well as from our ignorance as to how exactly the ancient Egyptians were able to ‘pull it off’. When, on the other hand, we are provided with a reasonable explanation, or even better, when someone is able to demonstrate to us how the pyramids were built, we might of course continue feeling a kind of wonder and bafflement with respect to the talent and industriousness of the ancient Egyptians. Yet, the mystery itself will fade away in proportion to our gain in, let us call it, technoscientific knowledge<sup>i</sup>. This is what Dennett promises to deliver for us in philosophy of mind.

But is the constitutive experience—the source—that originally triggers our wonder and bafflement—or anxiety and terror—about the nature of mind/consciousness and its relationship to ‘the objective world’ really one pertaining to a lack of knowledge—technoscientific knowledge? Let us just assume that what originally thematises the mind or the self in a problematic or mysterious light is rather akin to a kind of self-

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alienated experience, to something resembling e.g. an experience of alienation with respect to one's own mirror image. Here the mystery that touches us, that concerns and discomforts us, is, for lack of better words, a moral-existential force that places our very being—the very mind or thought that produces knowledge—in an alienated or split light. Now *if* the 'mystery' of mind has its source in something like this, how then, one might ask, would a scientific, or more generally, a purely epistemological theory, be able to address, let alone resolve/dissolve, the existential core or source of such a mystery?

## **2. The structure of the chapter**

As I just now hinted, a central ambition of this chapter is to argue that the mystery of mind, or more exactly, the mind-body problem, is rooted in, underpinned by, a moral-existential dynamic, rather than by some form of technoscientific ignorance. Part three of the chapter begins with a depiction of what might be called the 'hard' or 'scientific' naturalist mind-body problem, followed by the claim that this 'problem' masks or hides its own sense, i.e. its moral-existential dynamic, with(in) a kind of non-thought. I then proceed by rewriting the naturalist mind-body problem and provide a preliminary suggestion of the structure of the moral-existential dynamics of the split between the inner and the outer.

The fourth part of the chapter then to, as it were, works itself through this preliminary suggestion, beginning with a characterisation of the inner-outer split as formed by a tension between the individual on the one hand and social normative conventions on the other. Taking a cue from Wittgenstein's famous 'Augustinian picture of language', I move on to reflect on Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity, attempting to illustrate that Lacan, although contributing with important insights, ends up in more or less the same impasse as the naturalists.

Returning to Wittgenstein and especially his considerations on 'private language', the fifth part of the paper attempts to show—and thus in a sense confirm the preliminary suggestion in part two—how the tension between, on the one hand, the individual and its inner (private) reality and on the other hand, the outer socially determined norms and conventions, is in fact underpinned by a more constitutive moral-existential tension, namely a concern and longing for open expressiveness between *individuals*. Put otherwise, my suggestion is that the split between the inner and the

outer, self and the social gaze, is in fact a kind of secondary split, underpinned by a more fundamental moral-existential difficulty.

Finally, the sixth part constitutes an attempt to flesh out, in a sketchy and preliminary manner, some central elements of the moral-existential dynamics I suggest constitutes the mind-body problem.

### **3. The naturalist mind-body problem**

#### **3.1. What is the naturalist mind-body problem?**

The question we begin with then is: what is the source of the mystery of mind/consciousness? We approach this question by way of a more straightforward one, namely what is the so-called ‘hard’ or ‘scientific’ *naturalist*<sup>ii</sup> mind-body problem, to which Dennett gave voice?

Although Dennett belongs to the so-called ‘reductionist camp’, i.e. to those who claim that mind or consciousness can be given a purely ‘third-person perspective’ account, *without leaving anything essential behind* (Dennett 1991; 2006), he nevertheless shares a basic outlook on the nature of the mind-body problem with the ‘non-reductionist’ naturalists. It is this shared basic understanding of the problem, not the suggested solutions, which interests us here. At least three constitutive points of agreement can be identified. (i) Reductionists like Dennett, and non-reductionists like John Searle, Thomas Nagel or Colin McGinn (to name a few) — who hold that any objective depiction of mind will necessarily leave out the essence of it, namely the subjective qualitative character of experience usually called ‘*qualia*’ (Searle 1992; Nagel 1986; McGinn 1991)—agree that mind is a ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ phenomenon like any other phenomenon occurring in the body, such as metabolism or digestion (Searle 1992; Dennett 1991; Nagel 1986; McGinn 1991). McGinn dubs this basic outlook ‘existential naturalism’ (McGinn 1991, pp. 87-88). (ii) In addition to the existential naturalistic temperament, the field I term hard/scientific naturalism is united by the conviction that the ‘natural’ place to locate the mind is evidently the brain. As Searle puts it, consciousness ‘is entirely caused by brain processes’ (Searle 2007, p. 99). In other words, for the naturalists the mind-body problem is a mind-brain problem—at least on the surface. (iii) Finally, naturalists hold that while we know *that* the brain generates/causes mind and *that* it is a natural phenomenon, this ‘truth’ is not apparent either in subjective conscious experience—‘introspection’—or in our perception of the objective world and specifically of the brain: subjective experience (as subjective

experience) is ‘noumenal with respect to perception of the brain’ (McGinn 1991, p. 11). This is so whether or not the constitutive experiential asymmetric relationship between the mind and ‘the world’ is, in the final analysis, reducible to objective terms, as the reductionists claim. For it is from this asymmetry, based in our pre-scientific experiences of ourselves and/in the world, that the ‘problem of the mind’ allegedly arises and becomes a theme in our reflections on thought and experience. Hence the mind-body problem is ‘at root’, as McGinn puts it, ‘that we cannot see the mind’ (McGinn 1999, p. 51. See also Dennett 1996). And so the problem of accounting for *how* the ‘hidden’ or ‘private’ mind is generated by the workings of the ‘objectively perceptible brain’, is understood, in the general spirit of (post-Cartesian) modern philosophy, to arise out of an epistemological challenge pertaining to a structural source.<sup>iii</sup>

In retrospect, then, ‘existential naturalism’ can be understood as the naturalists’ existential—or ideological—*commitment* to a secularised and disenchanted worldview, or more strongly, a commitment to a scientific worldview, where the prime oppositional target is the supernatural, otherworldly or transcendental (allegedly phantasmatic) dimensions of reality.<sup>iv</sup> But rather than *causing* the mind-body problem, existential naturalism could be characterised as the normative landscape in which the mind-body relationship is played out. As the brain has, so far at least, shown itself to be empirically the most technoscientifically fruitful place to locate mind-body *correlations*, and as existential naturalism requires that mind be placed in the natural world, the mind-body problem transmutes into a mind-brain problem. But, it is the basic, pre-scientific, experience of the asymmetrical relationship between mind and body, or rather mind and ‘world’—the inner and the outer—that sets everything in motion. What this in turn seems to indicate is that, despite its seemingly epistemological character, the mind-body/brain problem has its roots in a kind of self-alienation, in a curious existential split of the self. The following quotes exemplify this:

My first year in college, I read Descartes's Meditations and was hooked on the mind-body problem. Now here was a mystery. How on earth could my thoughts and feelings fit in the same world with the nerve cells and molecules that made up my brain? (Dennett 1991, p. xi)

How can we reconcile our common-sense conception of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, speech-act performing, rational agents in a world that we believe consists entirely of brute, unconscious, mindless, meaningless, mute physical particles in fields of force? How, in short, can we make our conception of ourselves fully consistent and

coherent with the account of the world that we have acquired from the natural sciences, especially physics, chemistry, and biology? (Searle 2002, p. 1)

Given our objective understanding of physical reality, the question arises, how does such an arrangement of basic physical materials, complex as it is, give rise not only to the remarkable physical capacities of the organism but also to a being with a mind, a point of view, a wide range of subjective experiences and mental capacities (Nagel 1986, p. 29).

When we think reflectively of mental phenomena we find that we acknowledge them to possess two sets of properties: one set which invites us to distinguish the mental realm from the physical, the other which firmly locates the mental within the physical world. Among the first set of properties are subjectivity, infallible first-person knowledge, consciousness, meaning, rationality, freedom and self-awareness. These properties are not to be found in the world of mere matter, and so lead us to suppose the mind to be set apart from the physical body: we seem compelled to accord a *sui generis* mode of reality to mental phenomena (McGinn 1996, p. 17).

As we can see in these confession-like statements, they take as their point of departure the idea of a kind of basic alienated experience about the self 'in the world', which then gets, as it were, co-opted by the (ideological) commitment of existential naturalism. The self is somehow not there in the world of things, yet at the same time it, or traces of it, is somehow there—and for the naturalist, in contrast to for instance Descartes (1967), *it has to be there*. In short, existential naturalism portrays the mind-body problem as a self-alienation where the truth of the self is split or divided into two truths that seem to exclude each other—the one never finding itself (*as itself*) in the other.

But how exactly is the assumed fact that one 'cannot see the mind'—let us call it a *structural necessity*—supposed to generate such an existential experience? 'One cannot see the mind'—as far as this is meant to be purely a structural or epistemic proposition—is not meant to express merely a certain inability that we at the moment happen to be doomed to. Rather, it supposedly expresses a structural condition of human thought in that there is, so the claim seems to go, *no such thing as seeing the mind*, since mind/consciousness is here defined—at least in its pre-scientific, 'everyday' occurrence—as that which can only be experienced subjectively, i.e. privately by each individual: this is what it means—as far as it can mean anything—that mind cannot be perceived. In other words, mind—as it plays out in subjective experience—is not *hidden* from perception, but rather is simply not of the order of things in the objective world. Nevertheless, paradoxically, at the same time the epistemological question of naturalism—i.e. how can mind be placed *in* the natural (perceptible) world—is built on the presupposition that there *is* something unseen, something hidden, that needs to be

explained in terms of, or in relation to, that which is seen: this is why the two truths about the mind need to be ‘reconciled’, as John Searle puts it (Searle 2002). But what exactly establishes the *conditions*, as it were, for this kind of split of the self in two, which then in turn can give rise to a longing for reconciliation, or reunification? Can an alleged structural asymmetry function as a condition for such an experience?

### **3.2. Conditions for our existential split: rewriting the naturalist mind-body problem**

Naturalists are obsessed with the relationship between mind and brain—or rather mind and technoscience. At the same time it is obvious, as pointed out many times already, that in the notion that there is a *philosophical* mind-brain *problem* a differentiation, disassociation, alienation, on a macroscopic, everyday, or pre-scientific level, is already presupposed—or intuited. Here, on the macroscopic everyday level then a split between the inner and its expression is assumed, an assumption which *predates* the alleged structural impossibility of ‘seeing the mind’ in the *brain*. At play here is the experience of a split between the self and the other whose mind or soul one desires to see (or avoid), whom one wants to be close to (or take distance from), and with whom one wants to be open, transparent (or from whom one wants be shut off).

Why think of the mind and the body in terms of a split between the inner and its expression? Well, think of it this way: *if* the mind of the other—i.e. their intentions, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, desires etc.—*were* openly, transparently, immediately, present in the expressions of the other, it would be unclear what would motivate the, as it were, grammar of ‘one *cannot* see the mind’—unless, of course, there were instances when someone closed him/herself to such an extent that his/her mind *became* imperceptible. Under these conditions it would not at all be surprising that one does not see the mind in the *brain*: the brain would simply not be ‘the right place’ to look for the mind (cf. Bennett & Hacker 2003). What, in other words, would it be that would be left unseen, *if* the ‘inner’ would, as it were, travel all the way with its expression: why would we then still feel that something remained *unseen*—what would we still long for? So, before one can be baffled, anxious, about the seeming opposition between the mind and the ‘world’, or the ‘body’, there has to be a *felt experience* that the other’s and one’s own expressions—and the *responses* to those expressions—leave something concealed, that something remains hidden, as it were, behind the expressions—and the responses to them.<sup>v</sup> And, if one follows the naturalist’s dictum, it, the hidden, does not remain hidden occasionally but always, necessarily.

But again, what exactly could establish the *conditions* for such an experience—since it seems that the mind-body problem somehow structures itself around this type of experience? Let us say that I see a person cry out in pain, or that my friend tells me of her intention to plant a flower. What makes it possible for me to feel, to cognise, that something of the ‘real’ of this intention or pain—i.e. the mind of the other—remains unseen to me? What is it, in other words, that originally places a wedge between me and the other? Given the naturalists’ basic assumption, it cannot be because on some other occasion nothing was left unseen; I have, according to the naturalist, never experienced what it would be/mean to see the mind. Nevertheless, I must have some contrast to draw on here if I am to say—to *feel*, to *experience*—that *something* is left out and remains unseen: if no contrast is given, how could anybody be in a position to draw the conclusion that mind is not perceptible in expression?

Perhaps this experience of alienation arises because I *infer* from my own case of pain, beliefs, intentions etc. that my pain, my thoughts, my intentions do not present themselves directly, undistorted, in my expressions and that the same applies for others? Or, do I know that others do not see my mind? Has my friend told me so? And again, how does she know, how *could* she know that she has not seen it?

As I have tried to point out, the problem with the naturalist dictum that one ‘cannot see the mind’—or more precisely, with the claim that there is an experience of an unavoidable inability of seeing the mind which constitutes the ‘mystery of consciousness’—is that the knowledge that this is so assumes its (impossible) opposite, namely, the notion that ‘seeing the mind’ would entail being the other—or, alternatively, the other being oneself. That is to say, we (allegedly) know that one ‘cannot see the mind’ *because* we know that we (necessarily) cannot be the other. But how can this amount to anything? For the very notion of being the other—not just the sci-fi fantasy of being oneself *in the head of the other*—is a paradox, a non-thought: this is, as far as I can see, what the naturalist claims anyway. That is to say, the problem here is not simply that being the other—‘seeing the mind’—is factually impossible. Rather, the problem here is that we cannot even imagine it—we cannot really make sense of it: the notion of being the other cannot be made into a sci-fi movie. Consequently, the notion cannot even be an object of our fantasies, or of our desire. But now, if the notion of ‘seeing the mind’ is really supposed to be a non-thought—empty—then our (alleged) knowledge that we ‘cannot see the mind’ loses its footing as well.

The problem with the naturalist self-understanding of the ‘mystery of mind’ is then not only that we really cannot know what the naturalists would want to base the

whole mind-body problem on. The more constitutive problem is that the notion that ‘one cannot see the mind’ cannot, in the form suggested by naturalists, really be the actual source of that which constitutes our existentially felt alienation or split—and hence of that which gives rise to the mind-body problem—as this notion really isn’t anything that can as such be part of—thematized in—our experience or cognition, let alone our desire. Again, this is internal to the very way in which naturalists want to define what it means to have, what they refer to as ‘phenomenal consciousness’.

In saying that the alleged structural asymmetry between the inner and the outer, mind and brain, does not have the potency to function as a condition for an experience of alienation, and in arguing that the alienation or split of the human self is grounded in a felt split between one’s inner and one’s expression *in one’s relationship to the other*, I am of course also implying that the very condition for this split is that we in fact *do* understand what it means to ‘see the mind’, i.e. what it means, what it is, to express one’s inner directly and immediately and to respond to the other’s expression similarly. Put differently, what I am implying here is that the condition for there to exist an existentially felt split or alienation of the self is that we can see and exhibit mind just as well as we can and do know what it means to shy away from, and be shut out of, the expressive openness between self and other.

Yet, while this might be so, there is surely reason to reflect on why most of the canon of western philosophy (of mind), and more particularly contemporary naturalism, has tended to portray the mind-body problem as ultimately answering to a necessarily inherent structurally determined epistemological condition. A straightforward suggestion presents itself readily, namely, that the motive for masking our existential split or alienation as pertaining to a structural impossibility of ‘seeing the mind’ lies in this notion’s ability to provide a kind of justification for our desire to turn away, hide, from the openness between individuals: it acts as a defensive response to some deeply unbearable trait in our lives with each other. By this I mean to say, or suggest, that what we might call a ‘non-thought’ which takes the form of a proposition such as ‘one cannot see the mind’, can itself become *expressive* of a desire—while not itself being the (object of) desire; while not itself being a thought. And so, if we examine the logic of ‘one cannot see the mind’—or rather the logic of its opposite, ‘seeing the mind’—we will, I think, find that it does not simply express a desire to shy away from the openness between individuals, but *also* contains its opposite desire, namely a desire for the other, i.e. for open expressiveness. One might say that it expresses a split (in) desire.



What does the impossible notion of ‘seeing the mind’ suggest, i.e. what kind of desire does it express? Well, as already noted, it seems to express a desire to fully possess the other, or alternatively, to fully merge with the other: in order to see the mind one would have to be(come) the other, or the other would have to be(come) oneself. In both cases, if any real distinction between the two can be made, the outcome is annihilation of individuality, both of the other and oneself: annihilation of the *relationship*. But this annihilating desire must of course be understood in relation to another desire that this fantasy carries with itself. For the fantasy of possessing (or merging with) the other contains, nevertheless, a *relational* desire for the other: in order for the question of ‘seeing the mind’ to become thematised in the first place, one must first desire to see—to be with—the other and to be seen by the other. Without such a desire, there could be no problem, no question of ‘seeing the mind’. Yet, this relational desire simultaneously contains, as noted, a phantasmatic desire for a consummate relationship with the other, resulting in an annihilation of the *relationship*. So while the fantasy on the one hand functions as a way of making one’s (relational) desire for open expressiveness *impossible*, the ‘cannot’ of the ‘cannot see the mind’ nevertheless simultaneously signals a command to ward off the annihilating tendency of desire, arguably, in order to preserve, on some level, although in a distorted way, the relationship between self and other. Or, we might say that the ‘cannot’ signals the very impossibility of our desire for absolute non-relation, i.e. signals that we in fact do not really, cannot really, desire an absolute non-relation wholeheartedly. Hence, the fantasy at work here unleashes an internal conflict, a splitting dynamic.

## **4. The violence of words and the impotence of the inner self**

### **4.1. The Augustinian Picture of Language**

What I have attempted to do so far is, as it were, to rewrite the naturalist mind-body problem—to give it a new beginning, from which one will be able, I suggest, to start grasping the root-dynamic underpinning the pervasive self-alienation of human mindedness. Let us now attempt to explore the dynamics of this constitutive split between the inner and the outer in somewhat greater detail.

We begin by rephrasing the problem: if the mind-body problem resides in a tension between a self and its expression *in the relationship with the other*, we might say that the ‘outer’, i.e. expression, is experienced as the ‘matter’ in which the inner must take form, and that there is something about this matter, in which the inner must travel, which manifests as a felt tension or conflict. In addition to the body, our

expressiveness is of course centrally ‘mediated’ by normative conventions—at least this is implicit in the idea of the tension which we are trying to diagnose. And as so much of our thoughts, intentions, emotions etc., and their expressions, are constituted in language, language also seems to make up the ‘matter’ in which our inner must fit. But, as the language we use, with its norms and conventions, it is not created by us, how is it then that our inner is supposed to travel with our words, undistorted?

It seems to me that Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1958; henceforth *Investigations*) is centrally concerned with such an anxiety between a self and an other, especially if we here take the notion of the other (or Other) to stand for society, a network of conventions and norms, which poses a kind of determining and restricting threat to the individual’s innermost, let us call it, ‘real self’. The tension or question is already there latently in the opening paragraph of the book, in the famous Augustinian picture of language:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires. (Wittgenstein 1958, §1, p. 2e; Augustine 1952a, Book I, 8)

This picture of language portrays the individual, the infant, as equipped with its own *independent* desires and will, having their origin in God rather than in the interplay *between* the child and its parents. Furthermore, as Augustine explains, this picture of language presupposes an inherent understanding in the child, independent of its relationship to the parents, bestowed by God: ‘I, longing by cries and broken accents and various motions of my limbs to express my thoughts, that so I might have my will, and yet unable to express all I willed, or to whom I willed, did myself, by the understanding which Thou, my God, gavest me, practise the sounds in my memory’ (Augustine 1952a, Book I, 8.).<sup>vi</sup> In other words, this picture of language portrays the child as a self equipped with desire, *independent* of and prior to its relationship to the parents, as well as *independent* of and prior to the language through which it becomes able to, or forced to, express itself, i.e. make itself understood.

But there is a latent tension dwelling in this picture; the innermost ‘real self’ must always use the words given by the parents, by the society or culture, by the language community in which it must speak, if it is to speak to others. As the child does not create its own language, as this language with which it—the independent and non-relational ‘real self’—expresses itself is not *its* language; as it does not, cannot, stem immediately from the desire or will of the child, what then, one might ask, allows an undistorted relation between the ‘real self’ and its linguistic expression? If the individual’s own inner reality does not, cannot, determine the grammar and criteria of the language by which it must express itself, is it then only and always the parents, the language community, that possesses the conditions, possibilities, of the *meaning* of what one says? And where does this leave the inner, real, self? Is there, as Leibniz (1985) suggested, a kind of miraculous synchronisation or harmony guaranteeing that the ‘real’ of the individual always coincides with linguistic conventions—or with the object world of the ‘body’? Does the, as one might put it, ‘real of the linguistic community’—the rules of its language (cf. Hacker 1986)—absolutely coincide with, or absolutely guarantee, the ‘real’ of each individual? How on earth could it?

Those familiar with Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* will know that these are not explicitly the initial questions and concerns set in motion as a response to the Augustinian picture of language. Nevertheless, the matter emerges as the *Investigations* proceeds exactly, I would claim, because it is there from the very beginning, setting the stage. Take for instance remarks 143-147 where the question of how one teaches and learns the series of natural numbers is discussed. The focus of these remarks is on what one might call ‘public training’ (Eldridge 1997, pp. 242-290), a training that goes gradually from helping the child to copy the series from 0 to 9 to the drawing of the child’s attention to the recurrence of ‘the first series in the units; and then to its recurrence in the tens’ (Wittgenstein 1958, §144, p. 57e). In every step of the learning process ‘the application [of the series] is a criterion of understanding’ (Wittgenstein 1958, §146, p. 58e). And here the anxiety arises:

Now, however, let us suppose that after some efforts on the teacher's part he [the pupil] continues the series correctly, that is, as we do it. So now we can say he has mastered the system.—But how far need he continue the series for us to have the right to say that? Clearly you cannot state a limit here. (Wittgenstein 1958, §145, p. 57e)

And how many times, we might add, must the child apply the series correctly before we can, with certainty, say that he/she has understood? —We cannot state a limit here! And because we cannot state any limit to how many times the series must be applied correctly, it seems that we completely lose hold of any certainty about who is and who is not applying the series according to the ‘right reasons’, the ‘right rules’—given, that is, that we are principally looking at things from the perspective opened by the Augustinian picture. Consequently, we also seem to lose hold of how to determine, or understand, the criteria for what counts as the ‘right reasons’. So it seems that we are left with two opposing options. One option is that ‘real’ understanding and meaning is something that is hidden in the mind of the individual and revealed *only indirectly* through his or her ‘behaviour’ and/or expressions, and which hence always essentially require interpretation: *ergo*, the real, as it were, of the meaning of one’s utterance is always private. The other option is that that which determines the correct application has nothing to do with the individual(’s real), but only with how a collective, a community, i.e. an ‘outer’ *authority*, judges the situation.

The tension we find here is then one between the ‘outer’ or ‘publicly’ determined rules on the one hand, and the individual’s own determination of meaning on the other; a tension, one might suggest, regarding who has *authority*. Or, put differently, the picture suggests that it is not we who command language but rather we are at the *mercy* of something *other*, something *outer* which, in order for us to be part of *this* language community, to speak meaningfully, has to be *accepted*. In turn, this would also mean that it is not only we who must accept this ‘Other’ but just as much the ‘Other’ must accept us as part of ‘it’. It is as if some linguistic conventions or a community could demand or determine what we (must) mean, as though our ‘real’ understanding were nothing independently of the *authority* of the Other. The authority would in this case not simply rest with the authority of a specific other person, but the Other as the social gaze that defines the ‘rules of our language’ and subordinates each individual person under its rule.

It is, arguably, under the pressure of this tension that the associated anxiety, later in the *Investigations*, gets translated into a wishful fantasy of a ‘private language’—the basic structure of which is expressed (already) in remark 147<sup>vii</sup>—a fantasy, in other words, of a ‘language’—meaning— that stems from and only refers to the individual’s ‘immediate private sensations’ (Wittgenstein 1958, §243, p. 88e), saving or securing the *authority* and self-sufficiency—the meaning and existence—of the individual’s ‘real’.

I will come back to Wittgenstein and his ‘treatment’ of this wishful fantasy and connect it to Jacques Lacan’s theory of subjectivity. But first I will bring Lacan into the picture on his own.

#### **4.2. Lacan and the phantasmatic nature of the ‘real’**

Those acquainted with the works of Lacan will surely already have noted thematic similarities between his work and the discussion so far. I will here use selected elements from Lacan’s huge body of work as tools for making an intervention into the tension I have tried to point to between the individual and his/her social, symbolic community.

In order to get the target into focus, let us go back to Augustine’s ‘picture of language’. As we noted, for Augustine the subject, the self, exists before and independently of its relationship to the parents and its initiation into a language community. Moreover, the individual self is equipped with a will and with meaning and sense, before and independently of its ability to express itself in words. The child has something to say before and independently of language, i.e. independently of the social norms and conventions structuring ‘our language’. It is precisely here that Lacan suggests a radical break with the strong tendency in western philosophy to postulate a ‘real self’ beneath the very matter of the ‘body’. For, according to Lacan, the notion of a self-subsistent and consistent ‘self’ is a phantasm or ‘misplacement’ (Lacan 2004). The point here is not that the self, the ‘real’ of the self, cannot in principle express or find itself *in* language, a language that always comes from the Other; that its own meaning is necessarily inexpressible in words; that there is no ultimate synchronisation or harmony between the real and the norms and conventions of language. Rather, what is placed into question is the very notion of a *self* endowed with its own, independent, self-sufficient ‘existence’ (Lacan 2016, p. 115), ‘meaning’ (Lacan 2016, pp. 50-51) or ‘sense’ (Lacan 2016, p. 97).

So for Lacan, especially in his later works, it is not that there exists a real that is *lost* or *hidden* through the introduction of language—or as he more generally calls it ‘the symbolic’—but rather that the symbolic, culture, in which the *subject* and *meaning* are structured, marks a complete or absolute break with ‘Nature’.

I shall say that what specifies Nature per se is that it is not a nature, hence logical process as a means of broaching it. Through the process of calling Nature that which you exclude by the very fact of taking an interest in something, this something

becoming differentiated on account of being named, Nature ventures nothing save to affirm itself as a potpourri of what is not the nature of anything. (Lacan 2016, p. 4)

The inevitability or necessity of this break between the symbolic and the real, or culture and Nature (cf. Ragland-Sullivan 1991), should then be understood as internal and as unavoidable for subjectivity. Nature, or the living body of the *organism*—not the ‘body-image’ of the subject—is what is exclusively, authentically, the *organisms* own real, i.e. not determined by the Other (Verhaeghe 2009; Lacan 1998).<sup>viii</sup> Yet, at the same time this Nature is not, cannot ever be, *ours*, as *we* are always already—as *subjects*, as speaking, meaningful, beings—split from the (alleged) *organism*’s own *independent* Nature. That is to say, according to Lacan’s theory, as soon as one speaks, or more fundamentally, as soon as what one feels or experiences is dependent on and arises out of one’s relatedness to the other(’s touch)—or rather the Other—one’s Nature, one’s real, cannot find itself anymore: Nature becomes—always already—an *object* for the self/subject through the Other. Nature or the real, is, in other words, completely incommensurable with meaning.

Let me make a brief note here on the notion of the Other. It is important to emphasise that although the subject is, in Lacan’s theory, always relational, this relationality always remains ‘intrapsychic’ (Fielding 1999). For while it is actual persons who introduce the symbolic to the subject and hence structure it, the actual other person is in the same position as the self/subject: its real is trapped by the same social normative conventions—the symbolic order—that it introduces to the child/subject. And so we never meet or see the (real) other, but only that which is structured by the symbolic. Hence the Other is not the same as another person or being, but rather the bearer of the symbolic order, while the other (person) ‘is what remains most foreign to each of us’ (Chiesa 2015, p. 61).

Turning back to the main structure of Lacan’s theory, we might exemplify it with the help of the Lacanian notion, as articulated by Lorenzo Chiesa, of ‘the real impossibility of representing sex’ (Chiesa 2016, p.5). What makes the representing of the real of sex impossible in the symbolic is that the real is there *only* ‘before we think of it’ (Chiesa 2016, p. 24); i.e. it is only before we think of it that sex can remain ‘pure difference’ (Chiesa 2016, p. 70). The real is always, necessarily, *retrospectively* thematised for the subject. Further, this ‘pure difference’ of the real or Nature is itself utterly ‘in-different’ to the differences between the sexes that are attributed through the symbolic. ‘What is “most real” as pure difference’, Chiesa writes, ‘is the point of in-difference (i.e. there is no sexual relationship)’ (Chiesa 2016, p. 70). Hence, ‘little boys

and girls start off their ontogenetic—linguistic and sexual—process of subjectivation from a *traumatic* encounter with the *indifference* of the anatomical “little difference” (as “not part of a logic”) with respect to the symbolic difference of sexuation, which instead always-already surrounds them through adults’ (Chiesa 2016, p. 26). The real is not then ‘lost’ (cf. Verhaeghe 2002; 2009) through the intervention of the symbolic, so the claim goes, but rather simply does not ‘translate’ into the symbolic register: the subject has never been this real/Nature.

This basic, let us call it ontological structure of Lacan’s theory, suggests, then, that the fundamental split of the human subject arises because the subject’s very constitution (meaning, existence) comes from the Other, which in turn gives rise, in the subject’s psyche, to the idea that the subject *in itself* ‘lacks’ something, that it is not whole, that the real is always somewhere else, *lost* somewhere beyond the symbolic. The subject is, in other words, possessed by a ‘fundamental fantasy’ (Lacan 1981) of becoming total or unified (once more) (cf. Lacan 1992). More specifically, the fundamental fantasy boils down to a notion of an ‘absolutely self-enjoying substance’ (Chiesa 2016, p. 8; cf. Lacan 1998). And it is a *fantasy* exactly because there is no such thing for the subject as being a complete unity, i.e. being absolutely self-sufficient, non-relational.

#### **4.3. Can the Lacanian real be the source of the inner-outer split?**

Lacan’s theory of subjectivity seem to suggest that while the subject’s longing for complete unity, i.e. for absolute self-sufficiency, non-relation, cannot but always be a misplacement, can never be what(ever) the subject thinks it is, this longing is nevertheless supposed to have its origins in the real: the real Nature of the *organism* is supposed to unavoidably produce its continuous effects on the subject. As Chiesa put it, the constitutional ‘trauma’ of the subject is the individual’s ‘encounter with the indifference’ of the real/Nature. But why, we might ask, does the subject care about the real? Why does it *long* for the real, for absolute self-sufficiency, for non-relation? Why does it matter, for the subject, that it (supposedly) lacks something? Why do subjects have fundamental fantasies? Why the ‘trauma’? One issue that immediately announces itself here is that all the terms we utilise here, ‘longing’, ‘caring’, ‘fantasy’, ‘lack’, etc. are in no sense neutral, but rather loaded with a moral-existential charge: there is no neutral way for us to say that a subject ‘lacks’ or ‘longs’ for something, that it has a ‘fantasy’, that something (be it a fantasy) ‘addresses’ it. And if there is no neutral way for us to say such things, then this means, arguably, that we must understand all of these

things as arising out of the moral-existential life of the *subject*—or rather person—and not from outside of it (him/her); from the Lacanian real Nature.

Let us approach this from a somewhat different angle by asking what exactly it is that the subject, in its fundamental fantasy, is fantasising, desiring. For if the real or Nature is always a misplacement in thought and itself ‘able to contain *nothing*’ (Lacan 2016, p. 10), it seems to be quite unclear what it is we in fact are fantasising when fantasising about the real. Or more to the point, if the real is never what we make it out to be, if we in fact never can make any sense of the real, what is it then that actually touches us and evokes a sense of conflict with the symbolic: *what* is it that creates the conflict in our psyche? Lacan’s theory seems to suggest that human self-alienation is produced by a kind of magic: namely that it is *nothing*, a non-thought, something utterly meaningless, which stands in conflict with the symbolic. In other words, Lacan’s theory seems to suggest that it is a non-thought, that it is nothing that could actually be thematised in thought or experience, which nevertheless causes in us the experience of alienation. Take for instance the following quote: ‘The flame is the real. The real sets fire to everything. But it’s a cold fire. The fire that burns is a mask, if I may say so, of the real. The real is to be sought on the other side, on the side of absolute zero.’ (Lacan 2016, p. 102) Now there seems to be two ways in which one might come to reason, or at least imagine oneself to be reasoning, about the nature of the real. (i) One sticks to the idea that behind words, behind meaning and existence, there still remains *something*, which is really a nothing, i.e. of which nothing can be said, thought, or made any sense of. Yet *it* (what?) nevertheless is there, affecting us, marking the very core of our existence. Or (ii) one takes this to signal that the very *unthinkability* of the object of the fantasy is what constitutes the ‘mask’ of the fantasy, i.e. that the fantasy masks its real object of desire with the very impossibility of itself. Put otherwise, we might read the very impossibility of the fantasy as signalling that it cannot really be about what it makes itself out to be about, i.e. that what one actually fantasises about is *not* absolute non-relation, and consequently, not at all the Lacanian real. Lacan, and Lacanians, seem to opt for (i), although Lacan arguably continuously struggles to work his way out of the impasse he keeps finding himself in — there is an important insight, I would claim, attached to his claim that the real is always phantasmatic, although he himself does not seem to accept it fully.

But now, what we clearly need to ask ourselves is how Lacan(ians) could ever be in such a position (as subjects themselves) as to know that there is a Nature/real which functions as the source to our self-alienation, our split between the inner and the outer?



How, in other words, is the individual supposed to ‘encounter the indifference’ of the real/Nature, *if* the real/Nature is itself a non-thought, even as a theoretical term or postulation. That is to say, how is the theory supposed to hit any target at all with its ‘pure difference’, as it itself postulates that whatever it is that is there cannot be known, cannot be thought—we have no way of knowing what Nature is like, or, for that matter, whether there is any Nature at all there which the individual traumatically ‘encounters’ with respect to the symbolic. Put differently, how could Lacan’s own theory itself ever escape misplacing whatever it says about the real or Nature or even analytically postulates as it? Must not the notion of the real/Nature always arise out of the life of the subject, and if so, how could they ever manage to refer to something outside of meaning: what even makes us think that there is something ‘outside’ of meaning, something completely in-different to it, as we cannot, by definition, make any sense of such a thing?

The immanent problem I am trying to point out here is that *if* the split between the inner and the outer is tied to a felt conflict in the face of the symbolic order, *then* there has to be something, not a *nothing*, a non-thought, which actually conflicts with the symbolic.<sup>ix</sup> There has to be, in other words, a real, which is not the Lacanian real, and which does not reduce itself to the symbolic order. My point here is then not that Lacan is wrong to identify human self-alienation as in some way grounded in an existential experience of lack, or alternatively, in an experience of a longing for a real self in the face of a social gaze. Rather, my point is simply that the notion of a real absolutely outside of meaning, existence, sense, cannot constitute any base or sufficient conditions, as it were, for such an experience, as this notion in the end attempts to make itself absolutely meaningless *within* meaning. —It hits the same wall as does the naturalist’s dictum that we ‘cannot see the mind’. And so the force that touches us, and hence splits us, should, arguably, be identified, conceptualised, differently; this is my point.

## **5. Relocating the real**

### **5.1. Private language and the desire for open expressiveness**

If Lacan(ians) seem to opt for postulating a Nature in the *nothing*—option (i) above—in order to explain the split in the human psyche, I have been arguing that this attempt is doomed to fail and that we rather need to start thinking of the fantasy of the *nothing* as a mask in itself—option (ii) above. More specifically, what I mean to say by this is that

since the very notion of the Lacanian real must always remain a misplacement—this is what Lacan’s theory, rightly one might say, keeps insisting on—and we cannot hence really desire ‘it’—something Lacan himself only half-heartedly comes to accept—it is better to say that we desire a kind of non-relation *in* our relatedness. We do not, in other words, really desire, wholeheartedly, to give up our relatedness, but rather we want to bring the ‘real self’ *into* our subjectivity, i.e. into our relatedness to others; the annihilation of subjectivity, meaning, sense, and our relation to the other is never actually, wholeheartedly, desired—just as the annihilation of individuality is never actually, wholeheartedly, desired in the naturalist’s mind-body problem.

On the other hand, the opposite of the real, the social norms and conventions of the symbolic—the Other—cannot be what we really, wholeheartedly, desire either, nor what our subjectivity is grounded in. For if there is an existentially felt split at the centre of our soul, i.e. if the subject is not the subject of the phantasmatic real (self), but nevertheless feels unable to be completely reduced to, determined by, the symbolic, the tension between the real and the symbolic, as well as the ‘function’ of the real and the symbolic, must be understood differently. In short, *if* there is to be a problem with the symbolic *then* there must be some real, although not the Lacanian real, which actually is the source of a conflict with the symbolic.

It is at this point that I want to return to Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*. Earlier I portrayed the tension between the individual and its self-sufficiency on the one hand, and the linguistic community and its authority on the other, as a central driving force of the *Investigations*. And my suggestion was that it is centrally this tension that gives rise to the fantasy of a private language, and that the fantasy of a private language is in effect akin to the Lacanian real. Now I want to try and illustrate how, in the *Investigations*, this picture of a private language breaks down, and that there is something else than a non-thought, a nothing, i.e. something else than a meaningless ‘lack’, that becomes exposed in the ruins.

Let us now go back to remark 243, which was quoted earlier and in which the notion of a private language is explicitly put on the table. After having briefly imagined different ways in which humans might speak to themselves privately, but nevertheless *within* the reach of common language, Wittgenstein continues:

But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and the rest—for his private use?—Well, can’t we do so in our ordinary language?—But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the

person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (Wittgenstein 1958, §243, pp. 88-89e)

There is a sense in which this remark already indicates that the notion of a (necessarily) private language is in fact a fantasy. That is to say, the private language is certainly not the *de facto* language that we speak, but something very special, which we are invited to try to imagine. So more or less as in the case of Lacan's theory, what we are asked to imagine is something, not only different from but radically opposed to what we understand to be the language and/or meaning of *relational* human beings, i.e. of 'subjects'. We are, in other words, invited to imagine 'something', although we do not know what it is. Yet, we allegedly *do* desire exactly this 'something'.

In remark 261 we then encounter the frustration and anxiety surrounding the doomed pursuit of finding a way of articulating, naming, the subject's real, the 'something' which we are convinced we desire and which 'we' feel must be recognised and affirmed.

What reason have we for calling "S" [the sign supposedly used in the private language to refer to the speaker's sensations] the sign for a sensation? For "sensation" is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.—And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes "S", he has something—and that is all that can be said. "Has" and "something" also belong to our common language.—So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound.—But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described. (Wittgenstein 1958, §261, p. 93e)

As in the Lacanian framework—from which Lacan is unable to free himself—the (phantasmatic) real struggles to bulldoze some ground for itself *in* meaning/language—we may recall here the notion of 'Nature' and its complete 'in-difference'—only to find the 'common language' under every rock and stone. The inarticulate sound, a piece of gibberish, is all that seems to present itself as a viable option; at least *this* is not part of a 'common language'—why did not Lacan for example try to whistle it! Yet what would make this sound an expression; what is the condition for its meaning, the context or language-game in which it is uttered?

And so we come to remark 293, where an attempt is made to 'describe' a private language-game.

Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case!—Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. (Wittgenstein 1958, §293, p. 100e)

If, that is, we are determined, tempted, to think of our 'inner' lives in relation to language, i.e. in relation to our lives with other people, as ones where our expressions—our address to others—must refer to a private, independent and non-relational 'real'—or again, conversely, simply to a system of socially determined normative conventions—then this real has no relevance for what happens *in* language, i.e. *between* me and the other.<sup>x</sup> All of this is of course quite tautological. For all that is said here is, as far I can see, that *if* we desire to be with and speak to each other, and if we desire our 'soul' to reach all the way to the other's soul—and *vice versa*—we cannot at the same time desire our soul, our real, to be absolutely non-relational ('the *beetle* in the box'). Yet, despite its tautological character, what is revealed here is that *as long as* there is something upsetting, i.e. a tension, generated by the insight that in a private language the inner would be irrelevant with respect to one's relationship to the other, this tension must stem from a desire for an open and transparent expressiveness between self and other, and *not* from a desire for, or a fantasy of absolute non-relation or self-sufficiency. For if one in no way desires to have one's soul expressed to the other, i.e. if one actually desires absolute self-sufficiency and non-relation, then there is no problem here and one can gladly accept that one's soul is simply an irrelevant 'beetle in the box' and that language, i.e. one's relatedness to others, is nothing but formal linguistic conventions where no-one really meets anyone else.<sup>xi</sup> Conversely, as long as one actually does experience a tension in the face of normative conventions and experiences a kind of loss of self, and as long as this real self cannot in the end be a phantasmatic self, the normative conventions—or rather *the way one's relationship to the other structures itself around these normative conventions*—must somehow be in conflict with open expressiveness. And so, one might note, the breakdown of the fantasy of a private language does not serve as a confirmation of the social essence of language (cf. e.g. Kripke 1981), of the self and its relation to the other; an annihilation of the individual

into the collective. The only thing revealed, as it were, is a desire for a unity of meaning and expression *in* one's relationship with the other, beyond the conflicting and oppositional *authority* of 'inner' and 'outer'. It is this desire, the effect it has upon reason, which fundamentally sustains the power of the 'argument' we find in *Investigations* 293; it is what makes the private inner irrelevant.<sup>xii</sup>

## 5.2. The primary split and its justification

Now the crucial point I am aiming at is this: for there to be any existential conflict or concern in/with subjectivity there must also exist a reality—let us call it *the real of the relationship*—in which the 'inner' *does* travel all the way to the other's soul in expression. In other words, the open and transparent relatedness to the other is the condition for, the reality from which, the existential anxiety with the real and the Other/symbolic derives its force, and which is, as I have suggested, the home of our desire.

It seems to me then that the *primary* split of the human soul is a split between the open relatedness between individuals, on the one hand, and the way in which this openness is somehow also that which we shy away from, on the other. It is, in other words, a split in desire between, on the one hand, the open and transparent expressive relatedness to the other, and on the other hand the *reactive* desire for non-relation, i.e. the *reactive* desire to hide or mask the way we do see and understand each other. Or perhaps it would be best to characterise it in the following way: there is something about the way the self, and the other, *respond, as responsible individuals*, to the openness between individuals, which constitutes the split.

But why, if this is the *primary* split of the human soul, does the split then seem to be understood within philosophy—and more generally as well—as one constituted by a tension between a real, self-sufficient, self on the one hand, and a network of socially established and determined conventions and norms on the other? Let me give a preliminary suggestion: *if* the primary split, which in some constitutional way concerns the individual's response to and responsibility for the openness between self and other, then it seems, to some extent, understandable that this primary split is transmuted into a kind of *secondary* split, or a split within the split, as an internal attempt to justify one's desire for non-relation. Put differently, there is a sense in which the mind cannot sustain the primary split by itself as this would mean that one would have to sustain it while fully acknowledging that one is on a fundamental level responsible for it. Rather, sustaining it becomes bearable by characterising, i.e. misrepresenting, the real (*of the*

*relationship*) as a self which must necessarily remain beyond the grasp of the overwhelming authority of the Other. One might say that the *impossibility* of the real, or the *necessarily* distorting nature of the Other—the body, language etc.—is *presented to thought/reason* as the justification of one's own impotence, or rather lack of responsibility. Moreover, it seem to me that to the extent that we try to justify the primary split, i.e. to the extent that we tell ourselves that we desire or long for—have lost—the non-relational private real, we will also be destined to desire—in a split manner—the 'common language', the law and authority of the Other. This is so because once we fantasise our real as the non-relational private real, the Other, the 'common language', will *present* itself as the only viable way to uphold a relatedness to other individuals. Yet, at the same time, or conversely, as we retain our primary split, we allow ourselves to dwell in the fantasy that our real/true desire cannot find itself in a relationship with the other which is determined by the Other, and so presents itself the fantasy that the private real is the only viable resource by way of which the authoritarian and determining character of the 'common' can be warded off; the only ground on which a real of desire can be kept alive, albeit in phantasmatic, distorted, fashion.

## **6. The moral-existential dynamics of the inner-outer split: three cases**

### **6.1. The imposition of identity**

It is important to stress that in my critique of Lacan and of the naturalists, I am not denying that our subjectivity is split, that the anxiety about the relation between the individual and the other—as well as the Other—is real. Nor do I deny, and this is an important point, that the split in human subjectivity is *original*, always already there, insofar as we do in fact split ourselves—more or less from the very beginning. For, as it seems to me, there is no way in which the split could be derived from something else: it is only a split that can cause a split.<sup>xiii</sup> Yet, while I claim that the split in humans is *original*, this nevertheless *does not* mean that it is inevitable, irresolvable, necessary. My central point is simply that the split is internal to our responses (our responsibility) *as individuals* to our lives with others, which on some fundamental level is characterised by a primary expressive openness.

Now in the last part of this chapter I will attempt to enrich the picture I have been drawing through a short discussion of three different modes of the emergence of

self-alienation and its moral-existential dynamics. I begin with a typical case of a conflict with gender identity, i.e. a case in which social conventions and norms are imposed on and become part of the life of the child through the parents'—and other people's—own internalisation of and obedience to them. Let us begin by asking what it is that makes this kind of imposition possible? First of all in order for a gender norm to be an *imposition*, it must in fact mark an intrusion in the relationship between the child and the parent. That is to say, and in contrast to what Lacanians seem to suggest (see section 4.2 above), simply becoming accustomed to certain ways of expression, to a certain taste, to certain habits and appearances cannot, despite the fact that we might be able to identify these as belonging to specific normative conventions, just as such be in conflict with the child's own reality, since the child does not have any 'real' beyond its relatedness to others. It is, rather, only in relation to an actual conflict in the relationship between the child and the other that something stemming from a 'social convention' can become an 'imposition' and cause a trauma, a split or self-alienation.

Let's imagine that a child and its parent are playing around in an open and loving spirit. Now despite the open expressiveness between child and parent, no matter how the child comes to express itself—regardless of how it moves, dresses, etc.—these expressions are formed in relation to the parent and consequently in relation to the social and normative conventions of a given culture. Yet this formation will not be a straightforward replication of some norms and conventions in that, as Lacan notes, every single one of us, from one instant to the next, 'gives a little nudge to the tongue we speak' (Lacan 2016, p. 114), and more importantly, we might add, in that the very meaning of what is expressed comes to life in and through the expressive relationship with the other person. We speak, express ourselves, to other people and not to norms and conventions—although we might, as we all know, restrain and manage the open expressiveness between individuals by pretending to be simply replicating or following seemingly impersonal social conventions and standards. In short, there is no reason why the social norms and conventions have to, *unavoidably*, distort or restrain the open expressiveness between the parent and the child.

But now let us suppose that the child, which in this case would be a boy, notices his sister's dress and wants to put it on. It is, I think, quite likely that the parent will immediately feel the weight of collective identity norms. These norms might, *yet do not have to*, effectively translate themselves in varying degrees into the parent's response to the child's desire. The parent might for instance say to the child: 'But dresses are for girls and you are a boy'. Here, as Lacan rightly notes, the anatomical 'little difference'

in children becomes transmuted into essentialised identities. Or put otherwise, a difference, let us call it a 'pure difference' between the sexes, which as such does not in any given manner imply the type of significance suggested by the parent who retorts to a social norm, now nevertheless becomes, by way of suggestive hints or more brutal measures, a—or even *the*—difference, which in turn conflicts with the child's open expressiveness. And so the child's desire becomes split into, on the one hand, a desire to be with the parents and share their mutual desire for each other, and on the other hand, his/her desire for free, open and transparent expressiveness, exactly because the parent, through his/her normative intervention, distorts the non-split relatedness *between* him/herself and the child. *This* is what creates the conflict, not the symbolic order, the normative conventions *just as such*—for *if* the parent would not respond by denying the child's open expressiveness, *then* there would be nothing essentially distorting about the social convention of (in this case) dresses.<sup>xiv</sup>

This split in desire between the parent and the child's self takes on the form of an encounter with, and consequently an anxiety with, what we might, with reference to the psychoanalytical tradition, call authority and law: the parent's desire becomes an authoritarian law that 'must' be abided by in order for the child's desire for the parent's desire to be realised. That the effective force of law and authority—as opposed to brute (mis)use of power—hinges on desire should be clear: in order for the parent's desire to become a law, a norm—and note that *it need not do so* (see below)—the parent's desire must itself be desired to such an extent that affirmation by the parent outweighs the child's desire for e.g. the dress, or more precisely, the child's desire for open expressiveness. Yet, the reverse is also true. Namely, the exercise of the authority of the parent rests just as much on the parent's desire for the child's desire, i.e. for the child's affirmation of the parent/authority. There is then a kind of reversal of 'power' hidden in every *acknowledgement* of authority and law, at least on this level. For one might in a sense just as well say that the parent's authority is itself dependent on the child's authority over the parent, in that the parent needs the recognition of the child, a recognition/affirmation which is no-one else's to give but the child's. Or we might say that the language-game of authority presupposes a mutual address and desire between the 'master and the slave', where who is essentially master and who is slave cannot determinately be settled.

Is it not quite easy to understand why the child, i.e. the individual, is split in two in the face of such circumstances, and given the immense vulnerability of children? Or should we say, rather, that it is easy—that it comes naturally or impulsively—to



*sympathise* with the child's *response* to such circumstances? For are we not after all obliged to ask why the child *does* split its inner from its outer, 'assuming' (cf. Lacan 2004) or imitating a quite (for the child) incomprehensible socially determined and inevitably self-alienating identity (in this case a gender identity)? For although the child desires the parent's desire, there seems to be no necessity or automatism forcing the child to abandon its open and transparent relatedness to the parent, i.e. to assume an imposed identity trait as the cost of affirmation. To be sure, through this abandonment, the child gets the parent's affirmation. Yet, only in a distorted, or phantasmatic sense, for in this affirmation the child *him/herself* nevertheless does not acquire the desire of the parent since the child has already separated its inner from its outer, its appearance from its 'real'—or, we should say, the child has created an (in the end phantasmatic) 'real' or 'inner' by structuring its 'outer' in accordance with the law/norm of the Other. Likewise, since the initial problem, in the case we are discussing, is that the parent does not seek the desire of the child *him/herself*, but rather of the child as normative conventions prescribe, a desire which can be given only as the child assumes the norm and splits its inner from its outer, the child *him/herself* does not really receive, wholeheartedly, the desire of the parent. One might perhaps say that it is the appearance, the social/normative identity the child assumes that receives the (distorted/split) desire of the parent; while, similarly, it is not really the parent *him/herself* that desires this desire, for this desire (this object of desire) is determined by the Other, i.e. by social norms and conventions, and not by the parent *him/herself*—in his/her expressive openness with the child—although the parent utilises these norms and conventions in distancing *him/herself* from the very openness he/she feels threatened by, for whatever reason. By this I mean to say that on some shadowy level all of this must involve a certain recognition or understanding on the part of the child and the parent alike that such approval or affirmation of one's 'appearance' cannot in the end really fulfil one's desire.

Obviously, all of this also has to do with vulnerability, especially on the child's side. In order to avoid scorn, dissatisfied hints, accusations, mistreatment, perhaps even abandonment, the child seeks the desire of the other the only way it can: through approval or affirmation, forming its outer to please the loved one. But, one should ask, does this not exactly show that the dynamics of the split self centres on the immense responsibility that open expressiveness between individuals comes with; the fact that one cannot by oneself guarantee love *between* persons ('it takes two to tango'), that love so often involves conflict, conflict perhaps to the point of separation, abandonment? In

other words, does this not show that the split of the self is the inability, in some fundamental sense the unwillingness, to take on this responsibility of love?

We might of course say that we cannot *demand* such responsibility from a child, and so this makes no sense. And it is true, I believe, that the parent, *I*, cannot demand such responsibility from a child, nor from anyone else. But what does his/her demand, or *my* demand, or the lack of it, have to do with the issue? How do we imagine ourselves to be in the position to demand anything at all from others? And of what matter is to the dynamics of life what we demand of it? *If* again the issue here is that we could not imagine a small child refusing to assume distorting identity norms *because* of his/her vulnerability, aren't we then imagining that other people would in fact abandon the child, or mistreat it, in one way or another, until the norm is assumed? Perhaps we think that the process of natural selection has simply eliminated this option from evolution: those who refused to turn away from love or open expressiveness simply did not survive. But is this true? Would we really abandon those who tried to love us fully? Would we do it so systematically that loving wholeheartedly simply would become impossible—and is this our reason for saying that one 'cannot see the mind'? Perhaps it is not hard to imagine that this might happen, or does happen all the time. But would *you* do this to your child, or to anyone else? Whatever way we may be inclined to think of this issue, and this is my essential point, we cannot think of it in morally neutral terms. For if we say that it is human vulnerability that *causes* humans to (inevitably) split themselves—and even if we simultaneously think that this split is unavoidable, necessary—then we are in fact acknowledging that the problem here is our own evilness, i.e. acknowledging our own inability to love or care for each other, not because we necessarily 'cannot' love, but because we are morally unable, i.e. unwilling to do so.

## **6.2. The desire for social identities**

Adults surely introduce into the child's life their own narcissism and internalised, socially determined normative identities. Nevertheless, children themselves are also eagerly in 'jubilant' pursuit of affirmation of themselves *as seen by the other*, i.e. in search of affirmation of themselves as (phantasmatic) essential unities, attempting to make of themselves the 'One', as Lacan would have it.<sup>xv</sup> In short, children carry with themselves their own *original* narcissistic impulse *qua* primary split.

It is with a mixture of amusement and discomfort that one observes the child's (or the adult's just as well) jubilant and enthusiastic search for affirmation of its own self as 'great', 'loveable', 'strong', 'funny', 'cute' etc. The amusement and discomfort

relates directly to the obvious and to some extent self-aware pretentiousness of the child's 'look at me', 'applaud', 'I am...(some hero or what not)', 'look at my penis'. It is a narcissistic desire for the 'One' raw and untamed.

What the child in a sense plays with here is the double nature of authority, noted above. That is to say, in the child's calling out for affirmation of itself the parent is *ascribed* the position of authority, without the parent necessarily desiring it: the child is *in need* of an authority, for it is only an authority—the Other—that can affirm, provide, the (phantasmatic) 'One'. Yet, although the parent is *ascribed* the position of authority—the one who possesses the power to bestow the sought for affirmation—the child's jubilant narcissism seems to be attempting to challenge, destabilise or even invert the power-hierarchy, the position of authority. It is as if the child tried to own or overtake the meaning of the word that the *phantasmatic* Other possesses; as if the other could not but mean, by *this* word *this* child; as if the child would almost force the parent (as the 'Other', as the authority of law) to have invented this word/symbol because of the child him/herself: finally, the word/symbol finds its home in the child, the (chosen) One: the child him-/herself is *the (lost) object* which the word names.

The central observation here is, and again in contrast to what Lacanians seem to suggest (cf. e.g. Lacan 2016, p. 78), that it is not, in such cases, the parent, nor society, the Other, which imposes words and identities on the child, but rather the child *seduces* the parent to take on the role of the 'big Other': the child, in and through its primary split, attempts to impose essentialised words and identity on itself, as it were. Obviously, parents' response depends on their own desire and self-understanding, but it is nevertheless quite hard not to find the child's seductive attempt—how adorable are not children; and they know it, or they learn it very quickly!—discomforting, even to some extent, or on some level, uncanny. For what one witnesses in these situations is a quite intrusive break in one's relationship with the child, as one perhaps would like nothing else than to *not* be the authority of law, but rather explore the relationship—the other and oneself—in an open, let us call it, *anarchical* spirit. So although Lacan, and Chiesa, might be right in saying that all kinds of socially determined normative identities always-already surround children through adults, i.e. can be found there in the collective, historically conditioned, milieu of 'the world', this does not mean that children assume these identities simply because the parents, or society, demands it of them—indeed the parents may even actively attempt to counteract the assumption that there is such a demand and suggest an openness between them and their child—but

rather because children themselves have a primitive, distortive and defensive, desire invested here.

Whatever the reason might be for this seductive search for affirmation—whether it is a fearful attempt to reduce the vulnerability of open expressiveness, or whether it simply expresses ‘raw narcissism’—the central point here is, again, that this can cause an internal split in the subject—a split between an inner and an outer—only to the extent that the search for this type of affirmation actually stands in tension with a *real of the relationship* in which there is open, non-distortive/non-split, expressiveness between individuals, whatever this in the end means.

### **6.3. The desire for the authority of law and the denial of moral understanding**

The narcissistic jubilation with which the child immerses itself in the phantasmatic, but effective, power-relation between authority and the subject is not the only instance in which the *function* of authority is ascribed to the other/parent, rather than directly imposed on the child.

Think of a situation where a small child hurts another child, for whatever reason. Despite its inability to (as yet) comprehend the full meaning of moral concepts, the hurting as such cannot be separated from an understanding of moral reality. In hitting the other child, although the other child might have nothing to do with the anger of the hitting child, the mere understanding that one can do harm to the other and thus express one’s anger, fury, frustration, *implies that one understands the other as someone who can be hurt*, who can suffer, and, consequently, as someone who is hurt, suffers, is wronged. Without this there is no ‘hitting’.<sup>xvi</sup> Now it quite regularly happens that a child who has wronged another, does not him/herself directly take responsibility for the evil done by asking for forgiveness and showing care for the one who is hurt. Rather, the intervention of an adult is involved. This involvement might take all kinds of forms and directions but unfortunately it is all too often conducted in a ‘lawful’ spirit, whose character I’ll try to explain presently. It can be contrasted with an admonishment<sup>xvii</sup> where the parent simply attempts to have the child see or face what it has done, i.e. its own moral understanding, and take responsibility for it.<sup>xviii</sup> As we all know, even after the admonishment (in the sense I’m referring to here), the child often has difficulties with actually facing its own deeds, i.e. openly facing the person wronged. Instead, the child is prone to make apologies to the one wronged precisely in a lawful spirit, i.e. as a function of answering to a *principle, a rule, a law* that has been broken. It is *as if* the wrong one has committed relates to, or originates from, something else than the

suffering of the other. Now while this obviously is a way of dealing with the moral reality of the situation, it deals with it in an indirect and unavoidably misplaced fashion. For what it in effect does is to provide an escape from direct confrontation with one's moral *understanding*—which is due to the open expressiveness between individuals—by construing the situation *as if* the wrong one has committed is that one has broken a principle, a law—given by an authority that represents original desire. And, again, this might not at all be what the admonisher wants the child to do. Rather, it is the child that ascribes to or projects onto the admonisher this role: the child needs an authority in order to escape its own moral understanding and the responsibility such an understanding involves. This in turn constitutes—and is constituted by—a split in the self where one's moral understanding is, more or less, suppressed or even repressed deep into one's 'inner', while one's 'social behaviour', one's 'outer', answers to a law originating in the Other—i.e. in one's own desire for, or construction of, the Other—instead of answering to the direct relationship between the wrongdoer and the wronged—or the wrongdoer and the admonisher. Or alternatively, one's moral understanding, in being hidden deep in the soul, surfaces as an alienated principle that originates only from the outer, the Other, i.e. not from the *real of the relationship*.

Nevertheless, I think it is worth noting that the difficulty and resistance with which children (and adults as well) apologise to others is, in a sense, a *healthy* sign. Imagine a child, after admonishment, jubilantly apologising to the one wronged. This would be moral blindness if there ever was any, for it would indicate that the child is exclusively concerned with having itself affirmed by the 'authority'—which the child himself has construed. The difficulty and resistance with which a child apologises, on the other hand, indicates a moral sensitivity; that it is not solely a question of affirmation but rather there is a moral reality involved here that bears the weight of one's existence: it is, at least partly, the moral reality of the wronging that makes even an apology—in contrast to asking for forgiveness and caring for the other—so difficult.<sup>xix</sup> In short, the difficulty of simply construing oneself along the lines prescribed by the logic of affirmation, signals that one does not only desire affirmation of one's 'outer', but that there is a moral reality—the *real of the relationship*—which unavoidably ties together one's desire and one's moral (self-)understanding.

## 7. Final remarks

It might perhaps be said that this chapter has been overambitious. At least, that is, if we think that a philosophical text, in order to be ‘successful’, needs to ‘knock down’ its opponents—as if philosophy was a combat sport. And there is no reason to fool ourselves here, for we all know well how deeply the pressure to combat runs in philosophical thought, or the culture of western philosophy. After all, one of the founding texts of western philosophy, namely Plato’s *Apology*, places philosophy, i.e. the philosopher (Socrates) in a court of law, forced to *defend* himself against all kinds of accusations—although Socrates, arguably, tried to undermine the logic of the trial and replace it with the ‘pursuit of truth’. Despite all the virtues of the normative requirements internal to the practice of reason in law, the obvious problem with having philosophy placed in these courts is that, well, law equates truth with itself—or is unable to wholeheartedly care about truth. That is to say, the courts of law demand that a determinate statement be found. They are not places where ideas are explored, tried out, and perhaps drawn back without end.

Now I would like these final remarks to indicate the spirit in which I hope this chapter will be understood. For while much of what I have written has been in the tone that I claim to have shown, definitely, that the naturalists or Lacan get it all wrong, I think of this chapter as attempting to suggest a way of relating to the conflict between the inner and the outer that, in the best case, may help us gain an understanding of ourselves and others that does not force us to attempt to integrate paradoxical, meaningless, empty, ideas in it. And more importantly, what I hope the perspective I have tried to elaborate can do is to help us place the very problems or conflicts we have been discussing closer to our actual lives with others, i.e. to help us find ourselves in our difficulties so that they become something that we can take responsibility for, and thus indefinitely free ourselves from.<sup>xx</sup>

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- i For an account of what I mean by technoscientific knowledge, see Toivakainen 2015; 2018
- ii When I speak of naturalism, I will exclusively be referring to so-called 'hard' or 'scientific' naturalism, of which I give an outline in the text. This form of naturalism can, to some extent at least, be differentiated from so-called 'soft' naturalism (e.g. McDowell 1994). See Wallgren's chapter in this volume for a critical discussion of the problems of naturalism.
- iii It should be noted that the naturalist field also divides along another axis than the reductionist-non-reductionist one. For instance the non-reductionist John Searle who holds that the mind cannot be reduced to an objective third-person account, nevertheless agrees with Dennett's aspiration to elaborate a rigid scientific theory of *how* the brain causes mind because, he says, since 'we know in fact that brain processes do cause our states of consciousness' we 'have to assume that it is at least in principle discoverable *how* it happens', although he at the same time admits that we are currently completely ignorant of what such a theory should look like (Searle 1997, p. 197). Non-reductionists like Nagel and McGinn on the other hand, argue that while we know *that* the brain causes mind, we seem, due to a kind of 'cognitive closure' (McGinn 1999, p. 51) that characterizes the human (epistemological/cognitive) condition, to be incapable of giving a scientific (objective) explanation of *how* it does this.
- iv Note that the so-called 'soft' naturalists share the 'existential naturalist' commitment with the hard naturalists. Nevertheless, we should add that soft and hard naturalist might have different views on how 'nature' is to be defined or described. Wallgren's chapter in this volume is, among other things, an excellent attempt to challenge the rationale of such 'existential naturalism'. Charles Taylor's (2007) *A Secular Age* is an elaborate attempt to illustrate the historical and ideological forces that have given birth to existential naturalism.
- v My suggestion is, then, that 'the world' in the mind-world dichotomy is originally the relationship to the other, and not the 'world of objects'. This is a notion we can find developed by thinkers such as Martin Buber (1996) and Emmanuel Levinas (1969), but in a way closer to my own stance by Hannes Nykänen (2002) and Joel Backström (2007). See also Nykänen's and Backström's chapters in this volume.
- vi It should be noted that Wittgenstein does not cite this section in the opening remark of the *Investigations*. I do not claim that Wittgenstein reasoned the way I do.
- vii In remark 147 of the *Investigations* the preliminary structure of a private language, of a reactive defence against the totalitarian *authority* of the Other, saving the 'real' of the individual, is expressed as follows: 'But how can it be? When I say I understand the rule of a series, I am surely not saying so because I have *found out* that up to now I have applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! In my own case at all events I surely know that I mean such-and-such a series; it doesn't matter how far I have actually developed it.' (Wittgenstein 1958, §147, p. 58e)
- viii Lacan's equation of the real with "Nature", inverts, arguably, in a kind of Nietzschean (Nietzsche 1996) fashion, the Platonic-Cartesian dualistic idea that it is the body or nature that alienates the soul from its real home, namely reason. Lacan's theory suggests that the individual—its real—is originally the body, although not of course the object body, but rather the 'living body', while it is reason, meaning etc. that constitutes the organism's split into self and body, inner and outer, i.e. constitutes the subject.
- ix Compare this point with remark 249 in the *Investigations*: 'Are we perhaps over-hasty in our assumption that the smile of an unweaned infant is not a pretence?—And on what experience is our assumption based? (Lying is a language-game that needs to be learned like any other one.)' (Wittgenstein 1958, §249, p. 90e) In what sense could the infant's smile 'always' be a pretence? How could we know, distinguish, it as 'pretence' *as opposed to* a genuine/true smile? Such 'pretence' would lack its own conditions. One might also think of remark 251:

What does it mean when we say: "I can't imagine the opposite of this" or "What would it be like, if it were otherwise?"—For example, when someone has said that my images are private, or that only I myself can know whether I am feeling pain, and similar things. Of course, here "I can't imagine the opposite" doesn't mean: my powers of imagination are unequal to the task. These words are a defence against something whose form makes it look like an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one.

But why do we say: "I can't imagine the opposite"? Why not: "I can't imagine the thing itself"? (Wittgenstein 1958, §251, p.90e).

My point here is similar: If 'misplacement', 'lack' etc., like pretence, is all that is the case, it loses its own conditions for being what it (phantasmatically) professes to be/mean.

x By this I mean, more specifically, that here we find a conflict between expression and meaning: what relevance could the 'inner' as the true meaning have if it cannot reach beyond being more than a source or reason for expression; if it cannot go any further, travel with the expression: if my expression cannot *embody* the meaning?

xi Whether one *can* desire such a thing is what Wittgenstein's *Investigations* keeps on attempting to find out—or combat. In this sense one might read the *Investigations* as a succession of indefinitely repeated—and failed—attempts to again and again—after every failure—find a home for this narcissistic desire (for a more detail account of this, see Toivakainen 2017)

xii I want to note here that I have not said much about how exactly the discussion in the *Investigations*, and particularly in remark 293, has 'done the job'. Rather I have simply tried to pinpoint 'the conclusion', as it were. For a slightly more detailed discussion of the structure of the treatment see Toivakainen (2017) and also my unpublished draft 'Problems with grammar—problems with oneself' available at: [https://www.academia.edu/35435346/Problems\\_with\\_grammar\\_problems\\_with\\_oneself](https://www.academia.edu/35435346/Problems_with_grammar_problems_with_oneself)

xiii This is something I believe St. Augustine captures well in his interpretation of Original Sin. Namely, as he notes, the only true source of Adam's and Eve's fall from Paradise, was their will to 'live for themselves' (Augustine 1952b). The devil, disguised in the form of the serpent, could only draw upon this trait and utilise it, but could not create it. It was already, originally, there in humans, as part of their free will.

xiv There obviously remains the question as to why a given culture has certain norms and not others, and what the inherent problems with these norms are, a question that cannot of course be reduced to a singular child's relationship to his/her parents. Nevertheless, my point here is simply that any given socially/collectively upheld norm establishes its effects and affects in the individual through his/her *relationship* to others.

xv Here I am more or less referring to the type of trait in humans that Lacan identifies in what he calls the 'mirror stage' (Lacan 2004; Fink 2016). That my account differs on a fundamental level from Lacan's should be evident by now. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I do not appreciate Lacan's work and his many illuminating and sharp observations and analyses.

xvi Hannes Nykänen's and Joel Backström's papers in this same volume discuss this issue in more detail.

xvii Here again see Nykänen's chapter in this volume.

xviii Importantly, I would like to add, this means that the parent's focus should not simply be on his/her own child, fixated on having him/her apologise. For what the child then comes to see is that the parent is first and foremost concerned with how the child behaves (what principle it abides by) and not at all directly with the suffering of the other. So the parent had best be concerned directly with the one who suffers, that is to say, care for the one wronged, in conjunction with the admonishment (i.e. the admonisher him/herself had best be concerned with the other and not with the 'Law of the Other').

xix Obviously what also makes apologies hard is the *shameful* light one is inevitably cast in by accepting that one has something to apologise for. Yet, while shame might make it hard because one is seen in a bad light by the authority one wants to be affirmed by, I believe that this does not reduce the immanent pang of conscience which one's moral understanding causes in the face of an evil deed. Rather, if this is the right way of putting it, these two—shame and bad conscience—work in parallel in the split mind and desire of the wrongdoer.

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