

# Feeling and Freedom: The Medical Model from a Moral Standpoint

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**Abstract:** In 1958, G. E. M. Anscombe began her paper on modern moral philosophy by stating that moral philosophy had become impossible, and should be laid aside at present “until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.” In 1979, S. Cavell asserts that the difficulty with moral philosophy is that the “facts” upon which it operates are our relationships with one another, which are markedly different in kind from the facts of the physical sciences. Is there anything left, then, for modern moral philosophy to do, or have its issues been reduced to questions for psychology, or perhaps anthropology and sociology? Or shall we just study Aristotle? We are reminded of the criticism which Husserl leveled against the naturalistic sciences at the time when psychology and psychoanalysis (and sociology) were just earnestly beginning, namely that they have inherited a problem which enlightenment philosophy had tried, and failed, to solve. It is the problem of freedom, with its implications for rationality, moral agency, and intersubjectivity. This brief essay seeks to draw out the “antinomy” that continues in the conflict between scientific and humanistic approaches, despite the efforts of phenomenology and existentialism. The suggestion is that moral philosophy does have a province of its own, which contributions from both the transcendental tradition and the psychological studies equip it to address.

**Keywords:** Freedom, Feeling, Rationality, Medical Model, Purposiveness, Aesthetics, Value

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## 1. Introduction

One can't help but find it odd that a discipline created to serve the well-being (provisionally here, happiness) of persons, and whose explicit goal is the facilitation of capacity to “love and to work”, alternately conceived as “social feeling”, should find what is arguably its best exemplar and purest expression - namely erotic love - such an obstacle and conundrum, when it arises in the clinical setting. That it is inconvenient, embarrassing, and at cross purposes with roles, is of course not strange, and in the early years of psychoanalysis, its occurrence was characterized as exactly that: a malignant form of resistance, a hindrance to the analytic and/or therapeutic process. It was to be eliminated - interpreted away either by the patient's analysis or, if there were countertransferences, via the analyst's own return to analysis; failing this left the Scylla and Charybdis of either premature termination or unacceptable ethical breach. As time went on, however, Freud came to see transference phenomena, and transference love in particular, as

cornerstones of treatment, the emergence (or elicitation) and subsequent resolution of which were as important, if not more so, than any other technique [10]. Post- and neo-Freudians, conspicuously the Object Relations cohort, continued this strategy, constructing elaborate theories and methods on the usefulness of feelings between analyst and patient, should they be harnessed therapeutically [11, 12, 19, 25, 27]. Even Adlerian approaches [1-3], initially most reluctant to consider “love” feelings toward the analyst as anything but manifestations of an uncooperative attitude, and their reciprocation as anything but unprofessional, found that they were in fact common and inevitable, and might as well be made serviceable insofar as they could be not so much interpreted as redirected (into constructive “social feeling” in the patient's extra-analytical world). Recent literature, though still cautious, has increasingly admitted and embraced “the erotic” as key in analytic work [7, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28, 31, 32], and for Lacanians, the dynamics of desire, far from eliminable, are the clinical currency [33, 34]: both analyst and patient are viewed essentially as desiring agents, and it is precisely the tension thereby created that is the driving force

of therapeutic action and change.

From a medical point of view, none of this could be objectionable. If feelings, and the beliefs or processes which undergird, result from, or one way or another coincide with them, are the sources of distress, then clearly, treatment must consist in their successful manipulation. The medical model has a long tradition in philosophy; plausibly, it is the contemporary psychoanalyst or therapist, and not the academic, who most faithfully continues it and most authentically confronts, in her encounters with patients, the maladies of thinking and of the soul. We recall Socrates, renowned gadfly, awakening the complacent from their dogmatic slumbers, scrutinizing received ideas, challenging authorities, and instilling a penchant for critical thought in the Athenian youth. Playing the stock theatrical character of *eiron* allows him to appear innocuous while appealing to his interlocutors' vanity, thereby bypassing their defensiveness. He is not a doctor, and those with whom he holds his conversations do not ostensibly suffer, or seek his assistance to ameliorate any illness. Nevertheless, the philosopher has throughout tradition been envisaged as doctor to the soul and to society at large, tending to the diseases of thought and desire [23]. The Epicureans, Stoics and Skeptics are adamant about it: the philosopher is the personification of a function, alternately conceived as educative, mediating or guiding, whose tools are those of a sort of *logos* (argumentation and discourse), where the ailments operated upon are the false beliefs that provide the scaffolding for feelings, and where the goal of "health" is a flourishing life (*eudaimonia*) in the broadest conceivable sense. To this end, Socrates plays two distinct parts, though sometimes (subtly) both simultaneously. On the one hand, he is the architect of the *elenchus*, that alternately cooperative and combative sort of argumentation which results in *aporia*, which is to say, no determinate conclusion as to any state of affairs or what should be done or believed, but which stimulates reflection and draws out underlying presuppositions (in modern psychotherapeutic or psychoanalytic parlance, he facilitates differentiating thinking, or "reflective function", or, he makes the unconscious conscious). On the other hand, he is also the Socrates of the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Protagoras*, and *Sophist*; as such, he points to (or carries out) the other major duty of the philosopher and of philosophy as such, as it has long been conceived – namely, he channels, or cultivates, desire. Specifically: he directs desire (his own, and that of others) toward noble and uplifting, rather than base and ignoble, goals. He is unabashedly manipulative, he uses the rhetorical, theatrical and emotive tools at his disposal, for the betterment of his interlocutors, and this, unlike the false promises of the sophists, sets us free because it makes us more rational (sets us free from our irrationality).

The trouble arises as Cavell [5] aptly describes: "If you use alcohol just as the alcoholic does, or pleasure as the neurotic does, you may find yourself entangled in the practical problem of the freedom of the will". Which is to say: if one

adopts the medical model of the mind or of the person or of interpersonal relations, one may find oneself entangled in the problem of naturalism or psychologism, from which standpoint, as Kant (and transcendental philosophy generally) pointed out, it may be impossible to conceive of anyone as rational, free, or moral. For the constitutive use of reason, which yields natural (physical) science, of which the medical model an instantiation, can only account for empirical cause and contingent purpose; it cannot give us the purposiveness of the organism as a whole, or of nature as a whole [18]. And if it cannot account for our purposiveness, it cannot account for our freedom, and, as has been well enough documented (9, 29, 30), it cannot then account for moral responsibility, nor agency, nor rational choice. Natural (thus psychological) science can prove, and lay bare, determinate causes in the world, and can address the mind and person as empirically and contingently caused (hence manipulable). The ultimate purpose of an organism, of humanity or nature as a whole, cannot, however, be grasped this way, for final causes are never given in sensible intuition or in the determinative use of the understanding, which merely subsumes the data of experience under *a priori* concepts. Final purposes are regulative uses of reason - they yield guiding ideals which function as the conditions of possibility for determinate knowledge and moral and aesthetic feeling, but which cannot be given in a manifold of sensibility, and therefore cannot be schematized into objective knowledge. Nevertheless, so transcendental argument goes, our experience is such that we do, and must, assume final purposes in our judgments in order to be capable of judgment at all - be it scientific, moral, or aesthetic.

In scientific investigation, the idea of a final purpose, in which the parts exist for the sake of the whole and the whole for the sake of the parts, is heuristic, and guides the understanding to make meaningful connections, construing goals and aims (such as evolution and adaptation, domination or mastery), where there would otherwise be merely unconnected and inconsequential observations. In practical reasoning, the only thing that has worth in itself, and which can therefore serve as the standard in judgments about what one should do, is the good will [16, 17]; and this is good only when it turns away from every inclination, desire, need, or calculation of consequence, to respect and obey only the form of rationality itself, its ability to universalize. In judgments of taste [18], the beautiful is that in the presence of which our faculties of understanding and imagination harmonize and our recognized pleasure, which is our judgment of beauty, lies in this, together with the expectation that it be universally shared by a community of rational subjects. To be a rational, free and moral subject, in the Kantian tradition, is to be characterized by the following: 1) one has agency: one actively contributes what is indispensable for knowledge and experience, by the combined use of the architecture of one's mental apparatus and by the heuristic use of regulative principles; 2) one is free: one can [when being moral] abstract from inclination,

desire, worldly need and care and utilitarian calculation, respecting only one's identification with one's formal rational function, which in turn is most worthy of respect, because it is unconditioned [i.e. free]; and 3) one finds aesthetic value, viz., beauty, in the quickening of one's own cognitive faculties together with the expectation that these are shared by others in the community, ideally all others. The Kantian subject is free because she is rational, she is rational because she is free, she can be moral because she can be rational and free, she respects herself insofar as she prioritizes and identifies with a very particular sort of logical mental performance, and her noblest pleasure (as opposed to the lower sort, that of the merely agreeable, the satisfaction of particular preference) lies in the reflexive enjoyment of the stimulation of her mind together with the universalization of this experience - the notion that she is bound, by her feeling, into some sort of agreement, of pleasure and judgment, with everyone else.

## 2. Antinomy of Autonomy

We have, then, an antinomy of sorts: two apparently incompatible traditions in philosophy which go beyond distinctions such as those between idealism and realism, transcendentalism or naturalism, although this conflict involves those distinctions crucially. Taken separately, each ends in contradiction and incoherence. The bifurcation which emerges here concerns not only what is normative within the reflective stance and its products - philosophy or science (that is, once this reflective stance has already been taken up). It is a dispute more fundamentally about whether the medical model of *practicing* philosophy can do justice to our intuitions about human dignity, freedom, and rationality. Kant's protest is an existential one, radical and furious despite the patina of conventionality which notions like "duty", "obedience" and "respect" might lend, because it is the challenge of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, or rather, of Ivan Karamazov [8]. Who truly serves God (and is it God who should be served?): the grand inquisitor, who out of paternalistic "compassion" panders to the members of his flock, condescends to them and manipulates them but takes care of them, concretely and spiritually (prepackaged meaning/interpretations/truths and so forth), yet without appealing to their rationality, because he is convinced they have none? Or the revenant, who has come back only to be turned away because he expects those faithful to him to choose freedom, thinking for themselves, over happiness? Kant allows the pursuit of happiness, the satisfaction of needs and wants, in a roundabout way: it is more difficult to exercise your cognitive capacities, hence your freedom, when you are very hungry, or in dire straits. So you should tend to these as best you can. Kant's move is the reverse of utilitarianism and pragmatism: by aiming at happiness as such, we will fail, because we will fall short of our highest imperative, which is to respect the moral law in ourselves (thinking freely). But by aiming beyond happiness, disdaining and neglecting it when necessary, we stand our

best chance of securing it, because we're motivated correctly, namely by the dignity in ourselves and others, and by a love which is the only genuine sort because it honors this dignity. The question we are circling is this: can one reconcile a developmental account of rationality, love and desire with a transcendental one? Is the medical model of mind and praxis necessarily inimical to the existential and Kantian, the former advocating merely another sort of authoritarianism, the latter freedom, but a freedom that doesn't somehow have developmental (psychological) prerequisites, "conditions of possibility"? We may assume that one of the dire straits that would make it more difficult, if not impossible (for Kant would maintain one should persist and prevail in any case), for a person to follow universalizable maxims is psychological suffering, including the underdevelopment or impoverishment of their mind. And how to "think for yourself" when you haven't even mastered your language, or the conceptual structures and intellectual trappings it accompanies, which are taught to us by our elders and superiors. But the antinomy is precisely this: adopt a developmental, naturalistic view of rationality, and you get social and cognitive hierarchy, knowledge and power hoarded by a select few, and citizens, or students or patients, dependent and malleable, for they would rely in an infinite regress on external guidance for their thinking and will; this must be false. Or, take a Kantian approach, in which by some miracle, our ability to "think" (to mentalize, to exercise reflective and critical function) is *somehow not* dependent on the history of environmental conditions and significant relationships which facilitate it.

## 3. Imagination and the Relational a Priori

In *Feeling and Imagination*, Irving Singer criticizes the Platonic tradition for overintellectualizing, for taking affect and imagination for granted, and for a solipsistic view of thinking. He begins with an example of a singer performing for an audience and does a bit of phenomenology about what may be happening. The singer possesses technical skill, honed over years. He also has something emotively which he wishes to convey. He holds in his imagination the representation of himself, an exemplar of someone with an enviable skill, whom the audience admires as such, and with whose feelings they therefore especially identify. Grant the Kantian notion that for the audience, the music is "good enough" that cognitive faculties are pleasantly stimulated to harmonize, and that concurrently each member of the audience feels each other member should agree in feeling and judgment about the - beauty or significance or value, let's say - of the music. Moreover, there is the reciprocal relation between artist and audience, the audience identifying with him, and him with them: he imagines (represents to himself) that they admire him and also sympathize with what he seeks to communicate, they in turn identify with him and experience, as an imaginative possibility, what it might be

like to be an exemplar of a person with this skill and level of mastery, who is admired, and whose sentiments are understood and agreed with. This is conceptual (representational) and imaginative (perspective-taking, simulation-running) activity, a hermeneutic loop of sorts, but far from some intellectual interpretation of meaning, some subsuming of propositions or signifiers under others towards conceptual elaboration. It is the consummation of aims intrinsic to both moral and epistemological enterprise, if we believe Cavell, namely the striving for intersubjective agreement - moral agreement, insofar as the singer is esteemed and identified with, who reciprocates the identification and holds the audience, insofar as they are the spectators and auditors for the sake of whom he performs, likewise important: they matter to each other in this way. And there is agreement about a certain state of affairs, the representational content, however much it is, of what is artistically conveyed. Artist and audience are important to each other, they are essential to each other, they co-construct their mutual significance, and they share, for the time being anyway, the same moral world.

Singer's first point, which I transplant onto Kantian terrain, is that attending phenomenologically to affective and aesthetic experience tells us something about the relationship between thinking and intersubjectivity (being-with-one-another) that cannot be had from the parsing of argumentation, from the naturalistic study of evidence and behavior, or from speculation on natural purposes or drives. What becomes evident (what is seen) from this is an architecture of "mind" which is first and foremost (*a priori*) intersubjective and relational, not only taking account of abstract others *post hoc*, but requiring representations of others, with their empathized perspectives, for the purposive activity of thinking to get off the ground. Secondly, it becomes clear that *feeling* - pleasure in the apperceived activity of mental faculties, in higher order reflection upon the function and the pleasure, in the anticipated sharing of the apperception and pleasure with the projected community, toward a consummation of identifications, mirrored admirations, representations of competence and mastery, and interpersonal responsiveness - is part and parcel of "rationality", and that we learn a great deal about what rationality is when we examine the structure of such pleasures and consummations. To be in the world and to think is to aim at certain kinds of affective and imaginative states of affairs - realizations of projected possibilities. This is the prior structure of valuing, of prioritizing, with which we operate and which motivates both moral and scientific truth-seeking. To suppose that thinking can be done "on one's own" and to separate it from feeling (inclination, desire) is to mischaracterize it from the ground up, in Singer's view, and it is in Kant's aesthetic descriptions (his phenomenology of aesthetic experience) that we have, with a little unpacking, the solution to the paradox into which Kant's notion of moral freedom leads us.

Psychoanalytic and attachment theories [12, 14] propose principles of interlaced cognitive and affective development

("mentalization" or "reflective function" in attachment theoretical terms) in which primary caregivers are attuned to an infant's experience, respond appropriately, resonate with it and mirror it more or less contingently, and who thereby not only help the child to internalize working models of successful (not too frustrating, not too gratifying) relationships, but bring the child to language and thinking by helping it to name, identify, integrate, and reflexively elaborate upon feelings (object relations). Whether these theories have been arrived at by naturalistic or transcendental methods need not concern us here; for the mistake of naturalism is that it presumes the empirical existence of entities which cannot be given in empirical proofs, namely the purposive structures of thinking and the entities which are its special products. But we can suspend naturalistic hypostatizations about what the mind "in fact" is, or does, and elaborate (within the now phenomenologically reduced sphere) the implications of certain notions.

We began with the issue of transference/countertransference (feelings between patient and therapist) in psychoanalysis, with the puzzles it presents, interpretive and moral: what do our feelings mean, what do they tell us about ourselves and the world, when and how should they be indulged, what is it right to do. We contemplated the suggestion that the therapist's somehow "managing" the transference situation might be an effective therapeutic strategy, as it has come to be taken to be. This called attention to the structure of the clinical setting, in which a dyadic relationship is asymmetrical, this asymmetry characterizing the medical model generally: the doctor as agent, the patient (from the Latin, *patiens*: *to suffer, be done to*) relatively passive and reactive. Not to mention the asymmetry of theoretical knowledge and disclosure/vulnerability with the resultant asymmetry in power. We drew the analogy, not far-fetched and often enough quite explicit, between the medical model in psychiatry and the medical model of philosophizing, in which the philosopher's role is remedial - correcting ailments of thinking. But what, then, is the status of the philosopher and her "thinking", what the status of those whom she corrects; what the relation between them, and how, then, may we speak of "thinking for oneself", of equality, of enlightenment rationality and morality thus conceived, if it is not only susceptible to, but is constituted by, manipulation and authority? Kant sought to wrest "reason" from desire and feeling, or rather, sought to separate "reason" from all feelings except one, namely the respect for and identification with itself, in order to make it free. The price was empty formalism, universal maxims which cannot specify relevant descriptions [4, 6, 9] and thus have no content aside from the performative aspect (the performance of logical abstraction, with which one identifies, *qua* rational and moral). How can "thinking" be free, and yet relate to the world, be of or about the world, without succumbing to authoritarianism, and to the determinism of naturalistic and causal frameworks? In what way do Kant's and Singer's conceptions of aesthetic

experience help us solve the contradictions of enlightenment reason and morality?

What both the depictions of aesthetic experience and the models of psychological development point to are the conditions for interpersonal common ground (the Lacanian “third”, if you will) which can in turn become the basis for moral agreement. A Kantian judgment of taste appeals to the *sensus communis*, a community of others with which a sense of self, or *cogito*, is intensely and reciprocally, if only virtually, involved. To lay out its moments is to reveal the configuration of our “social feeling” (*Gemeinschaftsgefuehl*). Much vaunted by Adler [1-3] but never made conceptually explicit, this is our *a priori* hard-wiring, as it were, for intersubjectivity: the ways in which other subjects have significance for us and through whom we become capable, by virtue of these moments, of having significance to ourselves. Similarly, notions of “mentalization” or “reflective function”, in which consciousness emerges in increasingly sophisticated and adaptive ways as it resonates with others, not only clarifies the indispensability of a favorable interpersonal environment for the flourishing of rationality, but outlines a possibility of interdependence which is not hierarchical or coercive. We need not, under these circumstances, sever rationality from “feeling” - which is just to say, from other subjects and from dependence on other subjects - because it is a product of feeling, of these relationships, to begin with; as such, it is inextricable. Since our ability to “think” is emergent from beneficial relationships, the conflict between “rationality” and inclination can be seen not as an antagonism between reason and desire *per se*, but rather as a more or less cooperative engagement between certain kinds of “thinking” and certain kinds of desire; or better, between “thinking”, conceived merely and most broadly as a striving, and “inclinations” stemming from relationships that constrain or encourage this striving. But elaboration on this would take us far beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say here that although we may avoid naturalism by way of a relational *a priori* (presupposed by judgments of taste), the need for a Kantian “good will”, which stands over and against all worldly dependence and in this way asserts its freedom, is dissolved.

## 4. Conclusion

It is of course Heidegger [13], in his existential analytic, who sought to overcome the problems of transcendental philosophy by positing the prior structures of *Dasein*. He suspected Husserl of Platonism. Phenomenology could rebel as much as it liked against the naturalistic prejudices of the sciences [15], but unless it could account for our being-in-the-world in a way that was true to our experience (our moods, our circumspective concern, our equipmentality, our constantly being-towards and being-for-the-sake-of, the conventionalities into which we flee from ourselves and our responsibilities, our being-toward our ownmost possibilities, the preparation of the mode of

viewing which is prior to any “theoretical” discovering or thematization), it left us, with the transcendental ego, in an intellectualized stance from which vantage point it is impossible to account for our thrownness, our dependency on our facticity and our *Miteinandersein* (being-with-one-another). Unless, in other words, “thinking” can be coordinated with “feeling” in a way that aligns with our deepest intuitions, including our longings and desires, infantile or not, which is ultimately nothing more or less than what other people mean to us, we are still doing transcendental philosophy and we still inherit its enlightenment problem - reason as at best instrumental and at worst empty, tautological, and cut off from the life-world. Whether Heidegger in fact managed to “overcome transcendental philosophy” is a question for another time. Neither is it an original point that Kant’s description of judgments of taste plays a far greater role in cognition than he may have suspected. But if Anscombe [4] is correct in her assessment of the plight of modern moral philosophy, namely that “it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy... it should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking”, then an approach which builds out from Kant’s analysis of teleological and aesthetic judgment, and incorporates the insights of phenomenology and psychology, might provide this, and avoid the “dialectic of enlightenment”. The difficulty, as Cavell [6] notes, of knowledge in moral judgment and agreement is that it isn’t the kind of knowledge that the epistemologist (or even phenomenologist) is concerned with: states of affairs we can get straight on by assessing our “credentials and facts”, our “learning and perception”, perhaps not even by phenomenological reduction and eidetic “seeing”. Moral dispute concerns ... *what position you are taking responsibility for - and whether it is one I can respect. What is at stake in such discussions is not, or not exactly, whether you know our world, but whether, or to what extent, we are to live in the same moral universe. What is at stake in such examples as we’ve so far noticed is not the validity of morality as a whole, but the nature or quality of our relationship to one another.* ([6], p. 268).

After all, Ivan Karamazov is not angry at the grand inquisitor because the latter has found a way to give people what they want, and make them happier. He is not even that angry about the paternalism or condescension beneath the purported compassion, which the inquisitor doesn’t bother to conceal. Ivan is plenty condescending himself. And granted, being an intellectual, Ivan is upset about the apparent irreconcilability between authority and freedom - the technical, social and political complication this brings, particularly in the context of the destruction of the feudal order, the rise of the totalitarian bureaucratic state, and the threat of communist revolution. But what torments Ivan most, and the author whose mouthpiece he is, is the indifference of a God who allows - perhaps plays a hand in - suffering. It doesn’t square with Ivan’s intuition - or is it wishful fantasy? - about love.

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