

ETHICAL RELATIONS

Introduction

This dissertation addresses the nature of ethical relations. It is not an attempt to justify morality. Rather it is an attempt to elucidate what morality is and to seek an explanation of why the moral attitude is so important, why moral thinking has such a strong grip and how, given that this is so, it can sometimes fail. This is not to raise a specific problem such as that of the weakness of the will. The problem of weakness of the will, or *akrasia*, arises from within a particular theoretical and philosophical view of the mind and morality which assumes that there are reasons and principles which we hold at any one time and yet we are in some way unable to act in accordance with them.

Our understanding of morality *in general* cannot be divorced from our understanding of the manner of interactions between persons and the nature of mankind. We exclude some types of being as moral simply because of their dissimilarities from man. We normally suppose that a robotic, programmed individual that behaved as a human being, but had no feelings towards others, would not be moral because we do not believe that moral action is performed purely in accordance with computational processes. It is a widely acknowledged objection to a Kantian morality that we do not believe that actions lacking in sentiment or sympathetic compassion are entirely moral.

If we understand a robot with artificial intelligence as a purely rational being, we would not take it to be the same sort of moral being as ourselves if, indeed, we took it to be moral at all. What gives rise to this intuition about robots? Perhaps it is that they are not organic. But animals are organic and most people would not allow animals to enter into an ethical relation. It is thought by some that animals are not rational and do not have emotions¹. On this view, animals are excluded from moral interactions if morality essentially involves an emotion such as compassion. The view excludes animals, but lets in robots, if morality essentially involves rationality.

We do assume that the ability for adherence to rational or normative principles is essentially related to morality. We also assume that to be moral is to recognise values. Both assumptions require that the moral being is capable of non-empirical thought which is only available to a language user. However, the philosopher, Martin Buber, has claimed to have had an ethical interaction with a horse: The horse *responded* to Buber's caress with approval². Is this obviously false? I think not. But for sure, if our ethical theories allow for the possibility of moral robots, it raises the possibility that they are wrong. I

¹ For an example of an extreme view: Peter Carruthers in "Brute Experience", *Journal of Philosophy* 1989

² Martin Buber *Between Man and Man*, p.42

don't suggest that it is impossible to build robots which are programmed to abide by a code. I do suggest that what we mean by morality must be more than abiding by a code.

Many approaches to moral theory have made essential reference to the nature of man. Kant sought a metaphysical basis for morals in man's rational nature, positing a "Kingdom of Ends" which imposed rational moral imperatives upon action, but, as mentioned, this was to the exclusion of our normal moral notions, such as pity, remorse and compassion, as commonly understood. Aristotle and the utilitarians appealed to man's well-being and his desire for happiness. In most moral theories, only partial aspects of man's nature are drawn upon. The result is that there is no comprehensive moral theory and there is a lack of consensus on the nature of morality.

Traditionally, approaches to morality have sought to find metaphysical or objective grounds on which to found moral claims about right and wrong and the nature of obligation because the demands of morality are felt to exist beyond the subjective everyday interests of man and his selfish considerations. The idea that there can be moral understanding leads to the view that there must be a body of moral knowledge which we can come to know. Our moral language of right and wrong suggests the existence of moral "facts" which need to be justified in objective terms. However, our projects of trying to ground and justify morality abstract from ordinary life.

In ordinary life, we do not normally need to persuade a person that there is such a thing as morality unless one is appealing to a psychopath or nihilist. Philosophically, if we appeal to rational, deontological or objective considerations we just invite sceptical refutation. The sceptic claims that we cannot achieve knowledge of what is rational or what our duty is, and denies the existence of moral facts.

The moral attitude, or ethical relations, is part of our ordinary every-day lives. Rather than trying to ground and justify morality, a pertinent question is to ask what prevents someone from recognising morality. I believe the answer to this must be central to an account of what morality is if philosophy is to have explanatory value. Moral theory must be able to explain not only how a moral nihilist can reject moral considerations, but also how a person may be both rational and accept moral value and yet still act immorally on the basis of a positive decision which cannot be characterised as "weak". The fact that we take the person who does not recognise morality to be a psychopath indicates that the roots of morality are to be found in our psychological make-up and our relations to others.

Moral considerations are often held to be "overriding" in the face of selfish reasons for action. This, too, can have its root and explanation in the experiential nature of man's psychology and his relations with others.

It is in favour of the psychological approach to morality that it is about explaining the behaviour of the ordinary person. It might be hoped that it can make some advance towards explaining the immoral. However, in this dissertation I will claim that it fails to do this and in order to advance it needs to turn to depth psychology, or psycho-analytical

theory. Psycho-analytic theory itself gives rise to scepticism because its nature is highly speculative. I will claim that, nevertheless, it has explanatory value because it shows something about our experiences in personal relations, that it can be used to explain moral failure and, even if not true, this provides a means of deepened ethical reflection.

I will mainly look at the psychoanalytical theory of Melanie Klein. I shall then look at two types of what I term “meta-psychological” ethics. The first conveys the seriousness, or over-ridingness, of morality and the second brings together the meta-stance and psychoanalytical theory.

While psychoanalytic theory can account for moral failure, it also provides illumination of ethical relations and comparisons can be made with metaphysical accounts of ethics.

The Folk Scientific Model of Psychological Explanation

Folk psychology is explanation in terms of reasons and normativity, so I shall look at the nature of the moral as normative and consider how a person can avoid recognising normative considerations. I shall also look at how one might recognise normative moral considerations and yet fail to act in accordance with them and how a person might be brought to recognise the moral.

Explanation of behaviour in terms of folk psychology, which is taken by many philosophers to be the theoretical embodiment of our ordinary way of understanding ourselves and others, is normative, which means that it bears standards of correctness. Normativity is a concept which makes essential reference to what we take as rational. The rational man acts on desires and beliefs which can be explained in logical terms:

A desires that P

A believes that if P then Q

so A will do Q

When we explain action we use an interpretative ideal of rational action. The ideal rational action is performed on the basis of true or well-founded beliefs with foresight of consequences and is motivated by desire and will. This has first person application as well as constituting a form of understanding others. When we explain or justify our actions or those of others we do so by reference to beliefs and desires. The ideal agent considers the consequences: The ideal *moral* agent will take account of consequences for others. But further, for the ideal moral agent the needs of others must, in some way, constitute a reason for action.

On this model of action it is clear that we can say that the person who is consistently immoral, the paedophile for instance, does not take account of the consequences for others when he performs evil deeds. However, when he is not behaving immorally, he may well take others as a reason for action. The nihilist, on the other hand, denies that others constitute a reason for action at any time.

I shall take two examples of folk-psychological philosophers to look at their explanatory value, the first being Ilham Dilman. Folk-psychology has been described as “common-sense generalisation concerning mental states”³

Dilman in “Psychology and Human Behaviour: Is there a limit to psychological explanation?”⁴ argues that in the case of normal behaviour there is no place for psychological explanation and that psychological explanation only comes into play when a person’s behaviour is not genuine, ie it is corrupt. Dilman argues that there is a connection between the rational and moral, and between the irrational and immoral, and the latter he calls “psychological entrapment” in contrast to which “normative”, reasonable or genuine moral behaviour involves the idea of moral growth and development.

Normally, Dilman claims, when we ask why someone believes something, we expect they have good evidence for the truth of their belief and in most circumstances it is not even a natural question to ask whether beliefs are true. It is only in the strange case, such as someone’s believing that everyone is against him, that we ask the question, and “our question thus carries the *presumption* that he suffers from paranoia.” If we found out that actually everyone was against him, this “eliminates the logical room to ask and investigate”. Psychology can describe failure to be moral in terms of the presumptions we make about others’ psychology in ordinary language. This is folk psychology because it is not clinical or depth psychology, but focuses on explaining behaviour in terms of what seems to be common-sense truth discovered through ordinary language and logic.

Dilman’s position is that psychology has something to say only when there is a failure to exercise rational capacities. At such times, psychological facts stand in the way of ordinary thoughts and behaviour. A delinquent person, for example, is trapped within his “arrested development” and his behaviour is a form of repetition rather than action based on true beliefs. Such a person needs to work through his problems to enable him to “own” his behaviour because he has what Dilman calls a “determining psychology”. The morally weak person with a determining psychology is not in control, consciously. He cannot access the reasons why he is delinquent unless he somehow breaks out of the mould of repetitive behaviour. He is not “himself” because his behaviour is determined by historical forces which provide him with false beliefs.

When a person is not affected by false beliefs, he has an “enabling psychology”, and in such cases there is no call for psychological explanation. We attribute successful behaviour and beliefs to the person *himself* when he has an enabling psychology, but when a person has a determining psychology, we attribute his failures to his psychology. Dilman says of moral strengths that “it takes life’s difficulties to develop and to exercise them, and in their exercise a person is himself. Therefore it is *he* who finds courage in the strengths that enable him to face danger with courage. In his weakness, on the other hand,

³ Paul M Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, p 58

⁴Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, 2000, volume 75

a person fails to be himself. Hence his *psychological weaknesses* explain his failures in reference to the manner in which they stand in his way.”

According to this account the nihilist and paedophile have determining psychologies. The former upholds selfishness and holds the belief that the feelings and situations of others do not constitute reasons for action. The latter is driven by repetitive behaviour and, perhaps, holds the false belief that his behaviour is not destructive. The nihilist is rejecting the normative, or what we take as reasonable. The problem is that we need to show him that consideration for others is, in fact, reasonable. The nihilist is in the position to deny any reasons we put forward by claiming that these do not hold with him and he is not motivated towards them. As for the paedophile, perhaps he has true beliefs about his behaviour. He may be well-aware that what he does is illegal and destructive, but because of his determining psychology, he cannot help himself. How is he to break free from his determining psychology and become motivated to inner work? The question of how the nihilist avoids normative considerations and how he can be brought to recognise them must also have some answer in terms of psychology if this is an adequate theory.

The idea that a person has a determining history is Freudian but also appears to be a form of virtue theory. Moral behaviour must be genuine, virtuous and result from “inner work”. Dilman criticises Freud for holding that *all* moral behaviour has a psychological explanation, because then it is always corrupt and can never be genuine because it is determined by past history and doesn’t result from inner development based on virtue and the vision of what is good.

However, a Freudian is in possession of a theory which enables him to explain how a person comes to adopt a moral attitude by means of the internalisation of the parental code and the development of the super-ego. Dilman does not explain normal moral development or why a person possesses an enabling psychology, and it is difficult to do this without recourse to historical psychological data. If historical psychological observations explain the delinquent case, one would assume it would hint at an explanation of the normal case, but Dilman will have to move towards psycho-analytical explanation for this.

So far there is a possible psychological explanation for the repetitive behaviour of the paedophile, but it is not shown that the nihilist has a determining psychology or false beliefs, so it remains to be seen whether we can explain in folk psychological terms how a person comes to recognise morality in the first place and how he might fail to do so.

We also need to look at the case in which a person is rational and acts morally most of the time and yet commits an evil deed. This is not an example of a person committing an immoral or evil act on the basis of erroneous beliefs or a mistaken understanding of possible consequences. That is a genuine error which can be accounted for by reference to desires and beliefs, without reference to moral considerations. The problem is of a person who knows what is right and always behaves morally, but then performs a one-off

evil deed, intentionally, in full knowledge of what he is doing. We could call him Raskolnikov. He would seem not to have an enabling or determining psychology.

An explanation of different types of immorality will need to show how a moral principle takes a hold, the nature of nihilist's resistance to moral principles, and how behaviour in accordance with such principles may suddenly fail or be deliberately overturned.

Within the simple/ideal model of folk psychology, ie motivation explained in terms of desires and beliefs, we need to know how this sort of motivation is connected to ethical norms, or how external values or normative reasons become a person's effective motivating desires. This will show the difference between the nihilist and a person who accepts that others constitute reasons for action. Michael Bratman in "Two Problems of Human Agency"⁵ rejects an argument that normative rational reasons for action are constitutive of a person's nature as a type of volitional being. That is, it is not psychologically *natural* to be moral and so a normal agent is not *naturally* given to the "inner work" which Dilman identifies as essential to successful moral psychology. Bratman's first reason for rejecting this idea is that the type of volitional being a person may be could be depressive and such a person may have an inability to take interest in normative action which would make it difficult or impossible for them to change. This person would not be an agent if he cannot recognise and act towards justifiable ends, but we don't want to claim a depressive person is not an agent. However, Dilman can answer that such a depressive is not a *moral* agent. A stronger reason is Bratman's rejection of the claim that rational justificatory reasons can be adopted and become desires, because as such they have no stronger claim to motivate than personal non-rational desires.

Bratman agrees with Dilman that moral agency is "deliberation directed by the *agent*", or "person" as Dilman prefers to call him. It is agreed that the rational and moral agent/person has reasons ascribed to "him" and psychological explanation only comes into play to explain non-normative action. But Bratman does not adopt the Platonic view of the moral as virtuous or take the agent as someone able to perform "inner work". Rather, he describes an agent as acting for normative reasons because he has formed self-governing policies which have authority with him. Self-governing policies, to include adherence to normative rational codes of behaviour, are built up over a period of time and it is for this reason that they have strength as motivating forces. Moral values, or principles, on this view can be acquired socially, and will become a psychologically motivating force, even though possession of a moral attitude is not natural in the sense that an agent is not born to be moral. The nihilist, we are pleased to find, is not some distinct psychological being, but one who has actively rejected normatively recognised policies and replaced them with a different set.

Bratman suggests that there is a hierarchical connection between a continuous principle as a higher order end to be desired and lower level desires which may conflict with the continuous higher order principle. It is possible on this view to act immorally in disregard of a general policy when motivated, momentarily perhaps, by a sudden urge. Bratman

⁵ Proceedings of the Aristotle Society vol CI 2001

also recognises the possibility of a person's having self-governing policies that are morally corrupt. However, neither case would be sufficient to explain Raskolnikov who deliberately, in defiance of higher order moral principles, and not on the basis of a sudden urge, deliberates towards an evil deed. There is no supposition that Raskolnikov possesses continuously morally corrupt self-governing policies and it couldn't be the case that he has suddenly adopted one because of the time condition and continuity of self-governing principles. We still do not know what motivated him to change his principles so suddenly.

The problem of the nihilist is partially answered insofar as he can be taken to have totally selfish or morally corrupt self-governing policies. But what we want to know is why this is so and how an agent can be brought to recognise the moral.

Another problem for folk-psychology here is the very idea of normativity. Martin Hollis has noted that "what it is rational to do depends both on what it is rational to believe at a particular stage of human knowledge and on the demands of a particular and moral framework"⁶. But what is the "moral" framework? If this is true there is no such thing as a moral nihilist, but just a person who does not recognise a particular moral framework. Furthermore, standards of morality become relative to places and times. While it is true that cultural differences exist, as inter-cultural communication increases we converge on common behaviours and expectations.

But the question remains: Why adopt moral principles at all? The answer provided by depth psychology is that we already have moral experience.

The folk-psychological approach to morality raises questions. It focuses on the subject and explanation in common-sense terms, whereas it will be seen that depth psychology is an inter-subjective approach to morality. If we move from folk psychology and the subject's behaviour and his relation to principles to depth psychology and the subject's relations to other people, moral relativity no longer has a grip and we can see a reason for the adoption and development of moral principles.

A Psycho-analytical or Depth Psychological Explanation of Morality

Freud's explanation of moral development is in terms of the internalisation of the parental function during the early years of childhood. The development of the superego, which keeps in check infantile desires and wishes becomes an internal moral force. Such a force does not prescribe any particular moral principles, but is a constraining force whose introduction into the psyche constitutes a change in the structure of the personality which will enable a person to abide by normative principles. As seen in the previous section, Dilman and Bratman, who I have taken as examples of folk psychologists, take the moral agent to be either one who is rationally in control of his actions, or one who is able to adopt principles over a long-term period. The psychic mechanism that makes this possible could be the development of the super-ego.

⁶ Martin Hollis p278 *Reason in Action*

The folk-psychologist, as mentioned, cannot find an answer to the sceptic who can deny the rationality of moral principles over selfish ones. To ground morality in rationality and motivation, with the folk psychologist, is an invitation to scepticism.

On the psycho-analytical approach to the explanation of morality this problem doesn't arise, since it takes morality as rooted in the emergence of the subject in relation to others. Moral relations take place prior to development of rationality. It is recognised by Melanie Klein that the moral attitude is developed pre-linguistically, prior to ascription of and development of rational behaviour and ability to adopt principles. We have moral experience before, if there is such a thing, the super-ego develops.

In this section I will look again at the questions already raised. What we want to know is why a person is moral and how it is possible to be a nihilist. We also want to know how someone can be brought to recognise the moral and how they might fail to do so, and how someone (the Raskolnikov character) can fail to act on what he knows to be acceptable moral reasons.

Simply put, Freud's explanation of the nihilist would be that he is being defensive. Given that this is psychological rather than philosophical explanation there is no such thing as a philosophical moral nihilist. There is only the psychopath who is a psychological embodiment of the philosophical moral nihilist.

A more detailed explanation of how defence occurs is that given the tripartite structure of the personality of id, ego and super-ego, conflict is inevitable and one function of the ego is to compromise between instinct and moral constraint, but when conflict is intense it becomes a function of the ego to form defence mechanisms, one of which is "isolation of affect". Freud held that thoughts and ideas are emotionally charged. Whether or not we accept that is always the case, it would certainly seem to be so when we see that there are reasons before us to act morally. The thought that we could help, that someone is in pain, or that what we are doing is not socially acceptable, comes with some emotional affect. For the psychopath such thoughts can come isolated from the emotional affect. When the ego makes use of the defence of isolation, a person is cool and calculating and can think about the suffering of others with whom he is directly involved without becoming emotionally aroused. Sometimes this defence is "adaptive"⁷, for instance when it enables a surgeon to work effectively. The ego, operating according to the reality principle, protects the id, the emotional part of the personality by isolating emotion from thought. In the case of the psychopath, the ego protects the id at all times from emotions concerning others. However, if psychoanalytical treatment was able to bring a person out of his defensive position, we have a suggestion as to how someone can *become* moral. Currently, however, therapists are unable to get through to psychopathic personalities.

⁷ Raymond E Fancher, *Psychoanalytical Psychology: The Development of Freud's Thought* p.221

Of course, the moral nihilist is not unemotional. All we ascribe to the nihilist is the denial that there are *reasons* to act morally and so he needs to be answered in terms, not of emotion, but by way of something he can be brought to accept as a reason.

The philosopher who disclaims belief in moral principle or moral value makes a philosophical point about the nature of morality. Freud describes the psychotic patient as having withdrawn himself from the external world.⁸ Compare the philosopher who considers rationality and the adoption of principles without looking at inter-human psychological relations.

But to return to the explanatory power of psycho-analytical theory, the Freudian cause of psychotic withdrawal is frustration or non-fulfilment of a childhood wish which disrupts the relation between the ego and the external world. The external world governs the ego by means of perception and memory of perceptions. The distortion which takes place in perception, in the relationship between the real world and the internal world of affects, emotions and responses, means that such a person is out of touch with reality, including the reality of others.

The reality of others never becomes a part of the nihilistic psychopath's world. However, while the operation of a defence mechanism can plausibly account for odd instances or periods of withdrawal from the moral world and from good relationships with others, the historical account of a disruption which explains the psychopath is less plausible. Today Freudianism is widely held to be false, even though some Freudian theory has become part of ordinary folk-psychology. It is now normal to recognise defensive behaviours. However, the disruption of the relation between the ego and the outside world is empirically doubtful. Current scientific research has it that at puberty there is a huge amount of neural pruning or cell death so that adult development can start. Given neurological change, it would seem possible that cell renewal would mean that early trauma would no longer have an effect in adulthood.⁹

As will be seen, Melanie Klein does not think that an individual is always in moral or immoral relation to others. It will also be seen that Martin Buber sees the ethical as "momentary". It is difficult to believe in a total psychopath: Someone who *never* behaves morally and has no good relations at all, even if these are short-lived. But in normal cases, we are not always moral, or rational.

So we posit that there such a person as a nihilist for philosophical purposes. Looking at ordinary life and considering ethics from a psychological stance, it is received wisdom of psychology that a person can be in a defensive state from time to time. However, it is also true in ordinary life that a person may be immoral in certain respects. A robber, for instance, may be a loving family man and a supportive, loyal friend, but lack respect for property rights. Psychoanalytic theory, then, needs to explain not only "momentary"

⁸ S Freud "Neurosis and Psychosis", *Volume 19*, p.149

⁹ Information received by e-mail from Dr Steven Ravett-Brown

morality but also the man who has moral feelings in some respects but not others. This man I shall call “the career criminal”.

I shall leave the career criminal aside for the moment to suggest the Freudian explanation of the Raskolnikov character, whom Freud calls the “pale criminal” after Nietzsche¹⁰. The Raskolnikov character makes a conscious and reasoned decision to commit the murder of a rich and greedy woman. As the Kleinian, Richard Wollheim has suggested, “crime has a two-fold appeal: There are two ways in which it offers “mental relief”¹¹ Firstly, it can be a release from guilt which can become intolerable and oppressive and, secondly, the punishment attendant upon crime can purge guilt. Such motivation to crime comes itself from moral feeling, ie guilt. It is difficult to imagine the thief and bank robber driven by an intolerably oppressive super-ego, but this line of thought provides quite a possible explanation of the Raskolnikov character since this is a person who is assumed to be rational and socially developed in that he understands morality and values since it is only because this is so that he can decide to commit a one-off crime on principle. Sadly, of course, after committing his crime the Raskolnikov of “Crime and Punishment” was absolutely racked with guilt – and there is a suggestion that he sought punishment. The decision to commit a crime is in part reasoned since decisions are based upon reasons but if we believe Freud’s claim that thought is emotionally charged then it is also possible that Raskolnikov is compelled by feelings of the intolerability of moral oppression when he thinks about the moral standards of the society he lives in and plays a part in. In the case of the actual character in the novel, as Wollheim claims, punishment would provide relief. This would help Bratman out.

For Freud, guilt is only one source of criminality belonging to a particular personality type. It is interesting that we can accept this as a possible explanation for certain types of people and especially so when it is exemplified in a fictional character.

But returning to the career criminal, Freud can explain this by reference to the super-ego. The super-ego, as a constraining force against instinctive impulse, stands not just for the metaphor of a parental function, but also for the development of a psychical function whose force not only suppresses the instincts but provides a disposition towards recognition of a moral code. Again, the disposition towards adopting a moral code is what the folk psychologist needs.

Freud’s model of the structure of the mind and psychic mechanisms does not incorporate an account of man’s adoption of any particular moral principles. However, we are constrained internally by *some* moral considerations. The super-ego will respond to certain aspects of the external world so as to be influenced by those with whom a subject has a certain kind of relationship¹². The nature of the principles a person recognises can be determined by principles held either by close family, or normatively from society. As such, there is a possibility of distinguishing between socially integrated agents who act on

¹⁰ S Freud, “Criminals from a Sense of Guilt” Volume 14 p.318

¹¹ R Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, p.203

¹² S Freud, “Some Character Traits II” Vol 14

moral norms, and those who are affected by moral principles closer to home. In both cases, the disposition to act on moral principle is a function of the superego's constraint on instinct combined with the arousal of conscience. This distinction provides a possible answer to the problem of the career criminal who is neither totally immoral nor mentally ill but only lacking conscience and principles in certain respects. The principles which constitute his moral code may be derived from values received from friends, family and close community rather than of the wider community which determines normative standards of behaviour. As expected, this does not indicate psychotic factors which are present in the defensive mechanisms. It does suggest that we have dispositions to respond differently to the external world.

Leaving aside particular ordinary life cases, as mentioned above, morality is not a matter of varied values and principles if it is to be an attitude that does not vary across time and culture and avoids moral relativism: We need to be able to ask whether our norms and principles are "good" ones. Something deeper spurs us to ask this question even though we do not have an adequate definition of the term. But we can turn to those who describe the human condition in moral terms and show us something of the nature of morality beyond ordinary language and conceptualisation.

Melanie Klein accepted Freud's structure of the mind as id, ego and superego. Her own contribution to psycho-analysis is in her portrayal, based on her personal experience of motherhood and through clinical work with children, of babies as experiencing non-conceptualised moral feelings. Klein interpreted the child's development and perception of external reality in terms of the operation of our moral concepts such as guilt, remorse, reparation, and the awareness of good and bad. Melanie Klein developed a theory of "object relations" and claimed that feelings of guilt will normally produce a drive to reparation, but when a subject does not trust such a constructive feeling, guilt can lead towards a striving for omnipotence and contempt which often "cripples endeavours" towards real relationships¹³.

Going into more detail, Klein identified two positions through which a new-born child must go in order to develop emotions in relation to the world of external objects, and found that the experiences involved in each position recur throughout a person's life, so have explanatory value for the adult moral subject.

The first experiential position in early baby-hood is called the "paranoid-schizoid" position.¹⁴ In this position, a child has not developed an ability to perceive external objects, but he experiences a distinction between the good and the bad. At this stage of life the child does not have awareness of whole objects, but rather "internal" part objects. These are internal objects as they are not separable from sensory experience of the child. Klein's metaphors for the part objects as they affect experience are that of an ideal breast and a persecutory one. These metaphors stand for the good and bad experiences of the

¹³ M Klein, *Mourning, Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works* 1921-1945 p. 353

¹⁴ M Klein "Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms"

mother's body.¹⁵ The ideal object is that which gratifies by feeding and love, providing the child with a non-conceptual awareness of "good". The persecutory object is the withdrawal of the breast or that which deprives, causing pain, anxiety and the fear of annihilation. This provides the child with an awareness of "bad": Klein is not ascribing concepts to the child, but using concepts to describe his experiences of being offered the breast and having it taken away. However, these experiences constitute the foundation and origin of moral feelings towards and relations with others.

The anxiety is called "paranoid" because, in part, it involves a fear that the persecutory part object will both annihilate the self as well as the ideal part object. The position is "schizoid" because it involves a splitting of the good and the bad: The bad must be kept apart from the good because otherwise it will spoil and annihilate it.¹⁶ Although part-objects are internal objects or sense experiences, rather than external objective things, the child externalises each object: The bad because he does not want to feel the persecutory object is inside himself, and the good because "a world filled with malevolence would be intolerable".¹⁷ The paranoid-schizoid position is the first experiential phase of the child.

The splitting of an object into the good and bad is an achievement of the psyche which is important for later development since it "orders the universe of the child's emotional and sensory impressions" and as such it is "the basis of the faculty of discrimination"¹⁸. That is, the experiential differentiation of good and bad is man's first value discrimination, prior to his ability to recognise whole objects as separate from experience.

Projective and introjective identification are important concepts in Kleinian theory. In a state of anxiety the child will project the feelings of pain outwards which is how the formation of the idea of a bad object comes about. When he begins to feel aggression, this too will be projected onto the bad object. When gratified, the child will introject the feeling of goodness, feeling that it belongs both to the child himself and the breast, and in projecting such a feeling outwards he creates the idea of a good object. The child, then, experiences his own goodness and badness as a basis for value discriminations.

Two defence mechanisms can arise in response to the persecutory object and these can lead to a lack of discrimination between the good and bad in later life. The child who cannot tolerate the malevolent persecutory object may idealise the good object to the extent that the bad object is destroyed. Otherwise he can distort his experience and idealise the bad object itself. In later life, this can lead to "a fixation on bad objects which have to be idealised"¹⁹. Hence, an attraction to the bad, the frightening or immoral has its roots in the child's psyche before he comes to deal with social reality.

¹⁵ M Klein "Love, Guilt and Reparation" in *Love Guilt and Reparation*

¹⁶ M Klein *Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms* p.209

¹⁷ Mitchell and Black, *Freud and Beyond*, p. 92

¹⁸ Hanna Segal *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, p.35

¹⁹ Hanna Segal, *op cit*, p.27

The recognition of whole objects and the experience of guilt occur in the second position, called the “depressive position”. As mentioned, for Klein, the seeds of the moral discrimination are present experientially but pre-conceptually (and pre-linguistically) and are not initially derived from recognition of a person as of worth in himself (the rational Kantian stance), or from a disposition to internalise of socially determined value (the position the normative folk-psychological needs to adopt). Good and bad are experienced subjectively in a pre-objectified world. Ethical evaluations are primordial.

On Klein’s theory, internal experiences influence perception of the outside world. The experiences of good and bad may at first be attached to purely sensual gratification or deprivation, but they come to be associated with whole external objects, particularly at the first the mother. These qualities come to be felt as responses within the child at the same time as they are seen as qualities of an external person and this becomes the basis of subjective affective relations with others. All relationships will involve subjective response states and subjective responses and internal mechanisms will colour perceptions of others.

On reaching the depressive position the child will have – if successful - repeatedly identified with the idealised object so that’s his feelings of goodness come to outweigh those of persecution. Increased feelings of good lead to less fear of destruction by the good, so the child has become stronger in term of its ability to deflect anxiety. At this time, the child develops a tendency towards integration of experiences which enables him to see the mother as a whole object incorporating both the good and bad.²⁰ As the mother comes to be experienced as a whole external object, so the child becomes a self rather than a sensory being split between experiences of good and bad. It might be said that the child now has an awareness of the objective world of which he himself is a part.

During the depressive position, the paranoid-schizoid position can recur. A subject’s response to his own aggressive feelings can lead him to regress to a “splitting” mechanism so he splits off any good from the object and then by projecting his aggression, he perceives the object of his aggression as solely bad. This is an attitude most of us will be able to recognise as taking place from time to time in our adult lives. But it can lead to permanent problems. An example is where a person is unable to forgive because he has difficulty overcoming his paranoid-schizoid propensity for splitting. Whenever another behaves in what is regarded as a harmful way to the subject, he will permanently split off any good from the other.²¹

When perception of others does not give rise to psychic defence mechanisms, such as projecting bad feelings onto another, the perception of another will be made by a being who is whole and successful and functional in it’s relation with another person. Another person can be seen as both having both good and bad aspects and reality is not distorted.

²⁰ M Klein, *Notes of Schizoid Mechanisms* p.308

²¹ Hannah Segal, *op cit*, p 82

Having passed through the depressive position, the self is stronger, and the well-developed child is able to integrate the good and the bad, but new problems can arise. Given the new experience of the whole externality of the mother together with the possibility of her absence due to her separateness, new feelings of dependency and jealousy come into being. Jealousy is the desire to possess that which is separate so as to drive away rivals.²² With the child's new experience of jealousy, together with his innate tendency towards aggression, his anxiety now comes not from persecution by a malevolent part object, but fear that his own destructive tendencies will lead to the loss of the mother. The feeling that the mother might become lost to him because of these tendencies gives rise to a new feeling, ie guilt, which is characteristic of the depressive position. Guilt, then, arises from a person's own aggressive and destructive tendencies towards an object with aspects which can be both loved and hated. Klein does not essentially connect guilt with punishment. Rather, she sees it as a force which moves a person to reparative behaviour – at least in normal cases.

It is with Klein's theory in mind, that Wollheim makes the suggestion mentioned earlier that guilt can become intolerable and oppressive leading to bad behaviour which releases the subject from the oppression because he can seek the relief of punishment. For Klein, there are actually a variety of behavioural effects which can result from intense guilt feelings and her main examples are of cases where the feelings and attitudes of the subject become hardened so that he becomes alienated from others. Guilt does not always move a person to reparation, but can give rise to manic defences leading to "control, triumph and contempt", each of which is a denial of psychic reality, where this is understood as a genuine perception of the real relationship between the self and another. To regard the other person with contempt is to deny a part of oneself. As Klein puts it, "a part of the ego, from which the feelings towards the object emanate, is denied and annihilated as well."²³

Klein influenced Wollheim, leading him to accept that immoral behaviour can be a release from the intolerability of guilt. But Klein also makes another suggestion in terms not of guilt but of the super-ego. It is not lack of a superego, nor a lack of conscience, which leads to immoral criminal behaviour, but can be the "overpowering strictness of the super-ego".²⁴ Klein noticed in analysis that the intensely anxious child, in fear of punishment, is compelled to be naughty because his perception of the punishment he feels he is owed for his aggressive feelings is so terrible that it is only assuaged by the reality of lesser actual punishment. The super-ego does not look like a force responsible for guiding moral principles if it is also responsible for immorality. The super-ego, needed to support folk psychological adoption of principles, begins to look as if it needs more explaining if it is used as a support for normative behaviour when it also has a function of producing criminal behaviour. As mentioned, the super-ego, in not determining what principles we are to adopt provides an explanation for the development of the career

²² Hanna Segal, op cit p.50

²³ M Klein *Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms* p. 299

²⁴ M Klein "On Criminality" in *Love, Guilt and Reparation* p.258

criminal. But, in the light of Klein's suggestion, the idea of a super-ego needs further development if it is to be used to increase the explanatory value of folk psychology.

However, what is essential in Klein is not the super-ego, but that when guilt does not lead to reparative behaviour, it leads to the adoption of attitudes that are incompatible with love, care, sympathy and empathy. The dysfunctional mechanisms at work which occur as a result of guilt lead to different types of alienated behaviours resulting in immoral behaviour, recurring throughout life. These behaviours are more deeply rooted in human interactions than principles. The principle that we must not steal is a functional principle which we learn when we become language speakers. Even though we might hold this principle when we become language users, we can still be deeply immoral in the Kleinian sense of possessing a corrupt and distorted attitude to and perception of others.

The hardening towards, and alienation from others, can also result from not having successfully passed through the depressive phase or from not having repeatedly identified with the good, so that the child hasn't strengthened his ego sufficiently to cope with anxiety so he can love that which he may harm him, or he may have no faith in his reparative ability. In such cases, the drive to reparation will again become channelled to success behaviour, or control and triumph in an attempt to achieve omnipotence over the external other person.²⁵ Where guilt or aggression is felt towards another, this can be alleviated if feelings of success and omnipotence over the other can be achieved.

Kleinian theory is highly complex which could be a reason why it is not widely known and has not been incorporated into our folk psychological explanations in the same way that parts of traditional Freudian theory have been. Indeed, Kleinian theory may not actually be true. However, it does offer explanation of poor human relations and although it does not reflect our naive understanding of ourselves and others, it does offer reflection on human relationships as coloured by moral response before we are even able to recognise a person as a whole being. It offers the thought that we are born into moral relationships and have natural moral responses to others long before social normative principles come to play a part in our lives.

Although, Klein uses clinical examples of children, a real life example of the need for mental health in adult ethical relations is given by Hanwell Riker²⁶. Hanwell Riker doesn't refer to Klein, but makes the Kleinian comment that people who suffer from narcissism "have an overly grandiose sense of self-importance as a compensatory defence against low self-esteem" and that such people "get their feelings of importance by appearing to others and themselves to perfectly meet the standards of society". Hanwell Riker's example shows that appealing to norms of society can be harmful where people do not have functional egos. The example comes from M Scott Peck's "People of the Lie". A boy called Bobby was suffering from severe depression. It was found that his older brother had committed suicide with a rifle that the parents later presented to Bobby as a Christmas present. It turned out that Bobby was traumatised by this as it suggested

²⁵ M Klein "Mourning" in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, p. 351

²⁶ Riker, *Ethics and the Discovery of the Unconscious*, Chapter One

to him that he put the gun to the same use. When the parents were asked why they did this they said “Most boys of his age would give their eye-teeth for a gun. . . Money doesn’t grow on trees, you know. We are just ordinary working people”. When the parents were asked whether they had considered the message that would be conveyed to Bobby, they replied that they were simple working people who hadn’t been to college and couldn’t be expected to think of “all these things”. Here the appeal to the normal way of the working man who hasn’t been educated is held to be hiding an “evil” – that of a corrupt ego. According to Hanwell Riker, Peck’s view is that moral codes are an “essential part of evil”. Evil people, apparently, want to appear good and the existence of laws and moral codes allow them to achieve this.

In Peck’s view mental health and morality are one and the same. As I say, I would not deny the fact that we can name moral principles, such as “stealing is wrong” when we have entered into a linguistic community but would agree that we should locate ethical relations in the realm of inter-personal responses, identified by language such as Klein’s which lies beyond folk-psychological theory. To truly recognise that stealing is wrong it is necessary to be in correct psychological relation to the person who is stolen from.

In the next section, I will outline two theories of ethical relations which rely on metaphor to persuade us of man’s position of being born into a moral realm. Man’s relation to man is again taken as more fundamental to morality than the adoption of normative principles, even if we go on to accept normative principles as we become social beings.

Adopting normative principles cannot take the place of human relations. Klein shows that if a child goes on to successful integration and development in the depressive phase, he will pass through the emotions which make possible a complex relationship with others providing a full ability to empathise as a functional ego who can relate to others as real people with good and bad qualities in an accepting way. “In the best of circumstances, the cycles of loving, frustration, hateful destruction, and reparation deepen the child’s ability to remain related to whole objects”. To relate to a whole object, or person, is to see that the person we steal from is both good and bad, and in recognising that the person is good, we will not want to cause him harm.

I have suggested above that there is no such thing as the nihilist but, in ordinary life, only a psychopath. Any such description of a nihilist is an abstract construction devised by philosophers as a challenge to the claims of other philosophers to defend their stance that morality can be justified. Psychologically, Freud held rather implausibly that becoming a psychopath was the result of trauma. Klein gives provides further analysis of particular ordinary life cases in terms of guilt and defence mechanisms. Together they can account for nihilism (if early trauma can be made plausible), the career criminal (if the idea of the super-ego is honed) and the person who decides to commit a one-off crime.

Although the super-ego has become suspect, the Freudian answer to the career criminal in terms of the super-ego is to be preferred to Klein’s own comments on criminality. The following doesn’t seem to describe the loyal and loving family man who earns his living as a bank robber: “it is because the criminal feels persecuted that he goes about destroying

others; “One of the great problems . . . is their lack of natural human good feelings;” “Love is not absent in the criminal but hidden and buried”.²⁷

It is currently thought that there is a biological correlate for criminal behaviour and this is most likely to be low serotonin levels.²⁸ But this is not claimed to be a *cause*, and the suggested remedy appeals firstly to human personal relations. It is suggested that if children are violent the answer is to “train the family not to goad and fight them” and that “rewarding pro-social attitudes” cuts re-arrest rates to 35%.²⁹ Inter-personal relations and small changes in behaviour towards others on the basis that it is the responses of others that leads them to bad behaviours takes precedence today over the inculcation of normative moral principles as a corrective.

As far as the general problems of why we are moral and how we can bring someone to see moral value, the answer to the first question is that it is just part of normal psychic development as a human beings. We distinguish the good and bad before we perceive or can use language. The second question can be solved in a practical way by applying improved psychoanalytical techniques: The moral sceptic is a potential patient.

The Meta-Psychological Explanation of Morality

In this section, I shall leave aside the problem of different types of criminality. While explaining criminality and a withdrawal from “normal” human relations is well dealt with by the psychoanalytical approach, a problem with that approach is that the moral attitude, at least according to Kleinian theory, seems to amount to no more than reparative behaviour as a result of guilt arising from destructive tendencies. Why do we characterise morality as over-riding? Having rejected the adoption of current folk psychology as adequate for ethical explanation, and having accepted the possibility that Klein’s theory, though explanatory, is empirically false, I shall adopt the stance that some things cannot be said but only shown and turn to two attempts to show what the ethical attitude is.

It is not a matter of principle that we cannot ignore the presence of other people. As Sartre³⁰ has pointed out, if I find that someone, anyone, is watching me looking through a key-hole then my behaviour comes to me with a new description.

The philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber have their roots not in philosophy but in religion. However, both philosophers produce writings on ethics separately from theology.

²⁷ M Klein, *Love Guilt and Reparation*, p. 260

²⁸ W Wayt Gibbs “Seeking the Criminal Element” in *The Scientific American Book of the Brain*.p.210

²⁹ Wyat Gibbs, op cit, p. 214

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.261

Parallels can be drawn between Levinas and Klein in terms of the metaphorical similarities, most particularly in terms of passivity and guilt and substitution and reparation. Similarity of metaphor is not sufficient to claim compatibility between these two approaches to ethics but it is of interest that it does show that vastly different starting points towards consideration of the nature of ethical relations can share characteristics. This contrasts with the ethical theories of analytical philosophy which give rise to diversity and argument with no hope of convergence even though the ordinary language concepts used are shared and the writings come from a common tradition and background.

The metaphorical parallels between Levinas and Klein are suggestive of a common way of approaching the ethical and together they can be taken to constitute quite a comprehensive description of ethical relations, each with a different emphasis. While Klein sees moral relations as inter-subjective and liable to distortion of response, Levinas and Buber give more weight than Klein to the ideal response to the other person. As mentioned, Kleinian theory might not actually be evidentially true but it does offer observations which deliver insights into human behaviour and personal relations. Levinas would not even claim that what he says is “true” in an empirical sense. Nevertheless, his philosophy expresses truths that some people recognise. Levinas’s ethics, as metaphorical, is a non-propositional showing. Buber’s ethics bears a similarity to that of Levinas, but he holds that the psychotherapeutic relation offers a model for the ethical relation.

My claim is that nothing more is needed to justify ethics than the nature of man’s inter-subjective relations, where these are irreducible to folk-psychological theory which aims at generalisations based on interpretations of behaviour, characterising morality as a practice essentially involving principles, rationality and normativity, with the implication of moral relativity. Moral relativity is nothing other than cultural norms which can be crossed quite easily.

For both Levinas and Buber, the human relationship is essentially an ethical relationship. Both philosophers refer to this as the “I-Thou” relationship, which will be described below. For these philosophers, there is no internal isolated subjective self, but rather a self that comes into being on recognition of the otherness of another human, or the awareness of the reality of others’ subjectivity beyond that which is purely given in perception. The self is not a Cartesian ego, nor is it a rational plus emotional being. Rather, the self is essentially and fundamentally related to the subjectivity of other human beings whose own subjectivity we cannot morally ignore. Insofar as this description of the self is of an ethical self, it is possible to claim that for those whose relationships with others does not take the form of an “I-Thou” relationship there is not a real “self”. This can be expressed in the language of psycho-analysis: To treat a person as an object, which is to allow psychological dysfunction to colour one’s relations with others, is not to be a fully functioning self able to discern reality.

Talk of reality here is not a matter of facts which make our propositions about the world true, and for this reason we do not need to worry if Klein’s theory is “true” or not.

Levinas describes the ethical relationship as “non-thematizable” and “irreducible” to intentionality.³¹ An intentional state is a world directed mental state, such as a belief or a perception. A belief is true and a perception is correct if the world is the way it is believed or seen to be. For meta-psychologists, the ethical state is not an intentional state such as a belief and it cannot lead to moral “knowledge”.

Rather, the ethical is man’s relation to the other which is not reducible to a conceptual empirical description and is “transcendent” because man is not a self-contained individual but stands in an inter-subjective relation, not as distinct objects but as essentially related in their subjective state as ethical beings. The I-Thou relation is not a relationship between two particular subjects who “perceive” each other. Perception is an empirical relation and an intentional state but the metaphysical I-Thou relation transcends perception. Otherwise put, we do not just “see” a face, and we certainly do not have sense-experience of another’s consciousness and yet our attitude to another is *more* than a mere awareness of behaviour and physique.

The main contribution towards thinking about morality I think Levinas makes is in continually stressing that ethics is not to be subsumed under traditional categories of the intentional. The categories of reason, memory, perception, cannot capture the ethical. For Levinas, ethical relations are not determined by man’s psychological nature as traditionally described by philosophers. This is not contrary to Kleinian theory since, for Klein, distortion by means of introjection and projection are not intentional states or perceptions of real states of affairs which is why she needs to introduce new ways of talking about inter-subjective psychological development.

Because the ethical cannot be thematized, the language used by Levinas is necessarily metaphorical. In language that brings to mind that of Melanie Klein, the subject in ethical relation to the other is “passive”, “guilty”, “persecuted”, “held hostage”.³²

For Levinas the ethical is a call from beyond rather than a desire for reparation, although his language does not rule out reparation, and indeed, sometimes suggests it. For Levinas, the subject is “responsible” for the other in his vulnerability which brings to mind Klein’s account of the child’s fear of destroying the other person. However, Levinas stresses the importance of other people in our lives. He also describes the other subject as commanding us from a “height” and in its nature as commanding, the Other (or the consciousnesses and subjectivities of other people) has authority. Others are said to be both vulnerable and commanding. Levinas claims that there is no inconsistency here. Rather, the Other has a “contradictory nature. It is all weakness and all authority”.³³ Without authority, or the command that limits a subject’s freedom in relation to his behaviour to other people, the structure of the ethical relation would not favour other people.

³¹ E Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 32

³² E Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, Chapter 4

³³ E Levinas *Alterity and Transcendence*, p.105

The use of the terms authority and height are metaphors that express the irreducible and non-thematizable phenomenon of the ethical relation. However, it might also be said that others have a power over us in their vulnerability which is a way of expressing the “over-ridingness” of morality as it is spoken of in analytical philosophy. Ethical responsibility is a responsibility that is. Levinas says that “it cannot be evaded”. We can fail to meet ethical responsibility but it is there nevertheless.

Levinas is not oriented towards the particular situation to the same extent as Buber, but nevertheless he sometimes makes use of concrete examples. For instance, when we open the door for someone we do not need to perceive the man’s face to respond to him.

Levinas also uses the term “alterity”³⁴ to describe the internal subjective being or “otherness” of a human being. It is alterity which commands a moral response. The alterity, or another description Levinas uses is the “face”, of the other man is beyond the perceptual. What we perceive is a “countenance” or a “pose”.³⁵ What we respond to in the man for whom we open the door is his alterity or his face. We are not, in the example, looking at the man as we open the door. If we did, we would not perceive anything other than body and behaviour. We would not perceive alterity. The physical, ie the body and behaviour, gives us no reason to act morally alone. We do not make an assumption that another person is conscious on the basis of his behaviour and then go to treat him as such. Alterity is a given because we do not emerge as isolated individuals.

The face is a “signifying that is immediately from beyond the plastic forms that keep covering it up like a mask with their presence in perception”.³⁶ The pose or the countenance, as a perceived state of another person may provide us with reasons to act in a certain way, but the face commands an ethical response – it “summons me, demands, requires me”³⁷. We can perceive emotions on the countenance and in the voice. We understand that another is rational through use of language, but to non-perceived alterity we respond.

For Levinas, immorality is (non-intentionally or metaphorically speaking) a losing sight of the face, or failing to realise the subjective otherness of another person. Evil is also non-conceptual, non-thematized, but it is to be found in the nature of the description of experiential relations of one man to the other. “At the very moment when my power to kill is realised, the other has escaped”.³⁸ “Thou shalt not kill” means you *cannot* kill because at the moment you intend to kill the face, the subjectivity and humanity of the other has disappeared from your awareness. To be able to commit evil, to be immoral, is to not to recognise the full reality, which includes the face behind the countenance of the other man. This is comparable to Kleinian theory. When we project or use defence

³⁴ E Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*,

³⁵ E Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*

³⁶ E Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* p. 23

³⁷ op cit p.24

³⁸ E Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p9

mechanisms we are locked in a dysfunctional psychology and not in real relation with the other, but distorting reality.

Another similarity between the Kleinian emerging subject can be found in what Levinas calls “substitution”. The notion of substitution is to do with the emergence of the self. As mentioned above, for Levinas, the self is an ethical self prior to consciousness and intentionality. Subjectivity is a substitution which “precedes the will”.³⁹ The subject emerges in a state of pre-conscious sentience as one amongst all others before developing individuality and personal motivation. This is the origin, the condition and possibility of our being ethical subjects with “a responsibility with regard to men we do not even know”.⁴⁰ We enter into an ethical world in which others have authority over us. The subject “is constituted – without its knowledge, prior to cognition and recognition” as an ethical being.⁴¹

This Levinasian subject emerges as a “persecuted” subject, a “hostage” because his responsibility is already assigned. We are persecuted from the outside by being one amongst others. We are not only persecuted by the other, because of the responsibility we cannot evade, but the other is persecuted by us. As with Klein, the subject is in relation to the other before becoming a self or before emerging in relation as a whole to another whole subject and prior to the ability to perceive the external world as objective and not as merely experiential. A further comparison holds here in terms of shared metaphor. In the paranoid-schizoid position, there is fear of spoiling or annihilating the ideal object (ie of persecuting) and the experience of the bad breast as the persecutory one. This common language suggests fear and pain rather than virtue and well-being. It is language that intermingles the good and the bad as aspects of the human condition. It is an existential description. As with the psychic states described by psychoanalysis, we do not *feel* persecution. It is a condition that exceeds self-aware sense-experience or intentional relations. It is likewise with Klein. You cannot be properly projecting if you know you are doing so. To know that this is what you are doing would not be to distort reality but to see it in full self-awareness. We *can* become aware of using defence mechanisms because these are psychological states but that amounts to moral self-awareness.

Levinas has claimed that he knows nothing of psychoanalytical theory and has heavily criticised it. There is, however, only an incompatibility between Levinas and Klein if Klein’s theory is held to be a science, or a thematised ethics or a theory of intentionality, but nothing of the sort is being claimed for it here. Rather, it provides reflection on the depth and complexity of inter-personal relations. The essence of Levinas’s ethics is it’s poignancy and it’s affectivity. Klein, too, in making use of terms normally used to pick out adult illness, such as schizophrenia and paranoia, to describe the emotional nature of a baby, also has a powerful affect. It has been said of both Klein and Levinas that “both frame our attention to guilt as a complex ethical formation that both involves the subject

³⁹ E Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* p.127

⁴⁰ op cit p.100

⁴¹ Simon Critchley, “TheOriginal Traumatism” *Questioning Ethics* ed R Kearney and M Dooley

inescapably in a psychological history and has metaphysical implications”⁴² But there are further comparisons beyond guilt.

My own claim is that we are shown something about ethics, and provided with explanation, by looking at psycho-analysis and meta-psychology. We are drawn away from considerations of deliberation, motivation, will, rationality and normativity towards our responses to others, which we can dwell on but which cannot be reduced or put in more concrete terms. In writing about metaphor in ordinary language, William Grey⁴³ has said that “Many writers feel that there is something special about metaphorical expressions that cannot be captured by any allegedly equivalent literal paraphrase”. My suggestion is that when we move from metaphorical to more concrete terms we lose the essence of the ethical and that in reading Klein and Levinas, while not having to accept that what they say is empirically “true”, we are learning about the ethical. The ethical relation, being ineffable, can only be captured in metaphorical terms. This is to disagree with Wittgenstein’s famous comment that “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”.⁴⁴ If, as Levinas claims, ethics exceeds knowledge, ethical categories and concepts of ordinary language through which we seek knowledge will – and do – fail us. The other person, Levinas says, “does not affect us by means of a concept”.⁴⁵ Our relation to the other person is experiential, or phenomenological, but not reducible to concepts such as love and respect. Ethics does not collapse into empirical relations of love and sympathy since the subject emerges as an “I” in the ethical relation, prior to such attitudes and relations.

Of course, Levinas doesn’t provide tools to answer ethical problems, such as the career criminal as he speaks of our ethical existential conditional, whereas psycho-analytical theory provides a way of reflecting on this.

It is in the philosophy of Martin Buber that we see psycho-analytical practice as an instance of ethical relations and it is combined with the metaphysical approach of I-Thou.

Martin Buber speaks not so much of persecution but of isolation and guilt when man is removed from the realm of the inter-human, the realm of the dialogical or “I-Thou” relation.⁴⁶ It is natural to dwell with others as this is how we emerge as a subjects. “Dialogical” ethics, as the communicative ethics of Buber is known, takes man as already being in a community. As Rollo May puts it, Buber’s ethics recognises that “wish, will and decision occur within a nexus of relationships”⁴⁷

⁴² Susan Todd, *The Journal of the Philosophy of Education of Great Britain* 2001

⁴³ *Minerva* Vol 5 al.ie/~philos/

⁴⁴ L Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, no 7, p.74

⁴⁵ Levinas *Entre-Nous*, p.5

⁴⁶ Maurice Freidman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*

⁴⁷ Rollo May, *Love and Will* p268

Again, Buber's concept of a fact is not about empirical truth, but about human truths. "The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature." The sphere of man's existence with man is the sphere of "in-between"⁴⁸, which is not ontological but it is not unreal. The movement towards the in-between is a movement to becoming less of an individual and more human by means of an enabling of the other to be confirmed or responded to in a relationship like the therapeutic one.

In contrast to the meaning of "normative" in folk-psychology which is tied to rationality, the normative in the Buberian sense is about man's essential nature as one man amongst other men. While metaphorical, if compared with the categories of ordinary philosophical language, such as the proposition, the subject, the object and values, it is not abstract. It is less abstract than the categories of ordinary language because it points to what is natural and experiential. While Buber's language has less moral height than that of Levinas, both philosophers agree that the ethical is not an attitude that resides in an individual subject, nor is it something objective that requires justification. The ethical already is because man is born into the community of mankind. If we are to become more ethical, what is required is healing in the sense of a movement out of the individual and psychological, with its defences and neuroses, towards what is common in man.

For Buber, the psychotherapeutic relationship is an example of the dialogical relationship which is essentially communicative. As with Levinas, the ethical relation is not perceived, but made present. The psychoanalyst is present in a Kleinian way, providing a holding environment which is unthreatening, withholding projection and introjection, or as Buber would put it "confirming" the other person. The dialogical relation is in contrast to the analytical style of the Freudian couch. The relationship is one in which the analyst "shares in a reality which neither belongs to him nor merely lies outside him"⁴⁹ but which is the moral realm of spontaneous inter-relations, ie the response rather than the psychologically determined reaction. For Buber, the confirming response shows us what it is to be part of our moral community of man. But being in the moral realm is momentary, something we fall in and out of. Sometimes, for psychological reasons, we cannot enter into the moral realm, and merely react to people and situations. At other times we respond and confirm.

Much has been written both by Buber and others⁵⁰ on the therapeutic relationship as an example of the I-Thou relationship. Buber has once denied that there can be a true comparison because of the inequality in the therapeutic relationship.⁵¹ The therapist is always in a general position of power. However, he is not in a dominant position throughout a therapeutic dialogue as Buber sees the ethical as occurring in moments.

⁴⁸ Martin Buber *Between Man and Man*, p203

⁴⁹ M Friedman, op cit, p.78

⁵⁰ For example, "*Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*" ed. M Friedman

⁵¹ *The Martin Buber – Carl Rogers Dialogue*, ed by R Anderson and K N Cissna p.38

If the psychotherapist provides an example of the ethical relationship it is because he meets the other as a person. While it is true that a psychoanalyst will possess or come to form a body of depth psychological theory and that he is in a general position of power, he is an imperfect person, but has awareness of how to respond.

So for Buber and Klein man does not behave ethically all the time and does not always heed the Levinasian call. Psychic mechanisms can come into play at any time. It is not a question of either having an enabling psychology or not. Our capacities for ethical response or to psychological reaction constantly shift and alter.

Nevertheless, we are responsible, as Levinas says. Responsibility is no guide to actual behaviour. To ask what the concrete way is in which we are responsible is to ask for rules that are not applied. As John Caputo⁵² says, “When someone turns to us and speaks, the law dissolves before our eyes, for the law is never anything more than a schema, a general rule, a universal, while the individual is what happens. The law can never be cut to fit the singular, or else there would be as many laws as there are individuals”.

The above rejection of the idea that we either have enabling or determining psychologies, with the implication that man’s psychological nature is static, such that that a person can become virtuous by inner work which will show in all their human relations and actions is not the same as rejecting extreme personalities. There are singular people inclined to saintliness and others inclined to evil.

I think that the ethics of Levinas and Buber suggest that there is a reality which we can use to *describe* ethical personality. Our susceptibility to the over-riding call of Levinasian responsibility and our capacity to respond to others differs, normally, from moment to moment. There are extreme cases, though, which Levinasian ethics can describe. The saint is not necessarily someone who has a continuous higher order principle of doing good as the folk psychologist in the previous section would have to hold: If a saint was just extremely principled rather than caring we wouldn’t call that person a saint. Rather, the saint is persecuted by the reality and suffering of others. This is not to say the saint is *psychologically* persecuted. He isn’t in mental pain. But nor should we have to posit he that is suffused with love. The saint is not an essentially over-emotional and unbalanced being. The importance of the Other, alterity, the in-between is that it provides us with the idea of a reality towards which we can describe some as highly susceptible all the time, while most just are some times and in some respects.

I have suggested that the metaphor of the super-ego, simplistically understood here, allows us to see human beings as responding to certain aspects of the world. The career criminal, for instance, does not respond to the expectations of society as a whole. Klein shows us how a response might distort reality. Levinas, with his emphasis on responsibility holds that there is a call to respond. Buber contrasts response with

⁵² John D Caputo, *Against Ethics*, p 112

reaction. An ethics of response cannot be made determinate in current language, but that does not mean that it cannot be a fundamental part of ethical relations.

The realm of alterity and the in-between is metaphysical. Psycho-analysis is speculative and perhaps empirically false. But then perhaps, in words which differ from those of Wittgenstein, quoted above, ethics “is a topic on which no man will, wisely, dogmatise. The veil of mystery will never be lifted. We who stand before that veil [which divides knowable facts from mystery] can but build systems; we cannot see the truth”.⁵³ We need not dogmatise or build a system but we can still speak.

Conclusion

The categories used in traditional analytical philosophy have not solved the question of the nature of ethics, but have given rise to an enormous amount of discussion and argument. Some theories, which do not resonate with anyone at all have found their way into introductory textbooks. Emotivism, introduced by A J Ayer, is an example. The emotivist’s theory that “X is good” is reducible to “I like X” has been heavily criticised for not being able to distinguish serious moral arguments from non-moral persuasion.

As mentioned, there is no philosophical agreement on what ethics is. There is the rational ethics of Kant, who held that ethics could not be grounded in sympathy but that a moral command must have weight for everyone in the form of the duty of a rational being towards other rational beings. But it is counter-intuitive to suppose that sympathy, conscience and remorse are not of moral worth – but these can be part of a moral response. There is utilitarianism which explains ethics in non-moral concepts of means and ends and takes it as a calculation towards happiness. This gives rise to the feeling that the utilitarian is not talking about ethics at all but reducing it to something else. We are drawn away from the depth of the subject-matter. In contrast to this, Klein and Levinas speak in ethical concepts to show us something that cannot be fully elucidated in ordinary concepts, much less reduced. Talk in the language of the subject matter guides us to reflection beyond the restrictions of ordinary language.

Folk psychology is supposed to embody true explanation. As I have pointed out above it does not have sufficient explanatory tools to explain immorality, so it needs to move towards depth-psychology. Depth-psychology is widely held to be false. However, through the philosophies of Levinas and Buber, and the acceptance of metaphor, we can come to see that we don’t need to be limited to ordinary language concepts and accept common sense psychological explanations in order to reflect upon man’s elusive ethical condition. We know what Klein, Levinas and Buber are saying.

In ordinary language, we do have the concepts of value and moral worth, of virtue, conscience and sympathy. Many philosophers have written deeply about moral issues,

⁵³ G. H. Lewes “The Biographical History of Philosophy” quoted in Margot Waddell’s “On the Ideas of the Good and the Ideal in George Eliot’s Novels and post-Kleinian Psychoanalytic Thought.” In PSYART A Hyperlink Journal for Psychology Study of the Arts.

such as wisdom⁵⁴ and moral seriousness⁵⁵, but do not claim that these concepts can be used to develop a systematic theory of morality without abstracting and falsifying original human experience.

To increase our understanding of ethics, which is essentially a relation between human-beings, and perhaps animals, we might be involved in a movement away from ordinary concepts but this is the result of the natural distinction between experience and language, between what is natural, a response, and that which is constructed as a means of communication for practical purposes.

While it is the occupation of the philosopher to construct theories, to test them and to criticise them, in doing so he moves further and further away from the ineffable.

⁵⁴ Iris Murdoch *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*

⁵⁵ Raimond Gaita *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*