LECTURE TWO

What does ordinary ethics look like?

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I begin this lecture with the concluding paragraph of my book *Life and words: Violence and the descent into the ordinary*, for I wish to deepen my understanding of the sense of scandal that the idea of ordinary ethics causes (rightly) and to ask how might I give solace to the anxiety created by the notion that we might detect ethical living within the recesses of everyday life?

> My sense of indebtedness to the work of Cavell in these matters comes from a confidence that perhaps Manjit did not utter anything that we would recognize as philosophical in the kind of environments in which philosophy is done . . . but Cavell's work shows us that there is no real distance between the spiritual exercises she undertakes in her world and the spiritual exercises we can see in every word he has ever written. To hold these types of words together and to sense the connection of these lives has been my anthropological kind of devotion to the world. (Das 2007: 221)

In a later essay (Das 2012) I called my juxtaposition of the term "spiritual exercises"—derived from Pierre Hadot—with the work of repair and containment of violence that Manjit performed in her everyday life as "scandalous." As I noted in that essay, the reference to "spiritual exercises" in Hadot (1995, 2009) was to scaling moral heights, whereas I was trying to wrest the very expression

away from the profundity of philosophy to the small disciplines that ordinary people perform in their everyday life to hold life together as the "natural" expression of ethics.

But before I proceed any further, I should perhaps explain the significance of such names as Manjit in the previous paragraph and others, such as Asha and Billu, who will appear later in the text. These are figures whose singularity in my texts makes them both flesh-and-blood creatures and figures of thought. Rather than introducing each in the kind of detail that I evoked in my earlier texts I invite the reader to trust me and take them as already familiar figures (see Das 2007, 2015a) who helped me to understand the following critical points. Asha and Manjit are women I described as living with poisonous knowledge of how relations were corroded and how the familiar took on an uncanny character after the terrible violence of the Partition of India in 1947. Listening to their words over a long period of time made me see that rendering the violence as "traumatic memory" would touch on a very different register than the notion of "poisonous knowledge." While in both cases there is the concept of the past that is reanimated in the present, poisonous knowledge brings the past forward as embodied knowledge and not through the return of the repressed. I used the idea of descent into the ordinary—evoking descent both as a picture of anthropological thought and as a mode of being in the world. Shane Vogel does a perceptive reading of the project: "Here we find not narratives of transcendence or heroism, nor scenes of spectacular horror and violence, nor remystification of the event as the inassimilable, but the quotidian and mundane views that event unfolds" (2009: 255). The everyday, then, is taut with moments of world-making and world-annihilating encounters that could unfold in a few seconds or over the course of a life. The singular figures who dot the discussion in this lecture are those who helped me forge a method of critical patience as a mode of doing ethnography that was commensurate with the picture of thought as a movement of descent. While the everyday continues to be treated as the residual category of routine and repetition punctuated by the disruptions of the event in much anthropological writing, I believe we may be at the cusp of a change as the full extent of how the apparatus generated by pictures of planetary extinction seeps into our consciousness making the everyday appear as bristling with dangers rather than as a place of security and comfort (Masco 2014).

This lecture is written in the spirit of someone who is taking a few more steps to understand what a movement of descent into the everyday might mean for rendering ethical life as "ordinary." I do not aim to provide either a survey

of the field or to contest other ways of thinking of ethics. Instead, what I want to ask is "what is it that blocks our ability to see the everyday and hence to imagine the ethical as inhering in the quotidian rather than standing out and announcing its presence though dramatic enactments of moral breakdown or heroic achievement"?

My analytical impulse in this lecture is to engage the writings of those with whom I am in overall sympathy for their attention to the ordinary but who, following the fifth-century Buddhist philosopher, Buddhaghosa, I might call "near enemies" (*aasana paccathika*)—as distinct from distant enemies (*duura-paccathika*)—being mindful that the reference is to near enmity of concepts and not of people (see Boleyn–Fitzgerald 2003; Sponberg 2001).[1] What are the subtle differences that surface in the scholarly work of those committed to the idea of ordinary ethics and everyday life as a source of ethics (as my fellow authors) but who might differ, for instance, in the weight they place on habit versus judgment, or in how the idea of the human emerges (or not) in relation to cultural differences? These differences have consequences for our understanding of ethics as ordinary and for the project of ethnography itself, as I hope to show. It is also the case that our reflections on ethics respond to the problems we have encountered in the world. Some, like Webb Keane (2015), might be moved by the desire to make anthropology a partner in a dialogue with other disciplinary practices such as those of neurosciences. Others, like Didier Fassin, might be moved by the need to determine the balance between contemplation and action. And yet others, like Michael Lambek, might be interested in working out how ethics might be treated as intrinsic to life. My own concerns stem from existential moments I encountered in the field that made me ask repeatedly, how can ordinary, everyday acts stand up to the horrors of ethnic, sectarian, sexual violence and at the same time be capable of morphing into these very acts of violence? Can we even speak of ethics in a world that seems to be so corroded by the circulation of hate? How can we make our own expressions "just" or "right" when so many ethical pronouncements that are made in the public domain seem to be either hollow or plain dissimulations in which the gap between words and deeds is so large you could drive a horse carriage between them? I make no excuses for the fact that my devotion to understanding better the humble, the quotidian, the everyday, comes from these existential questions—my

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1.   I have used phonetic spellings rather than diacritical marks as a way of making words in Indian languages easier to read for those not trained in these languages.

quest is not necessarily to find answers that will settle these issues once and for all, but to simply find a way of taking some more steps in the company of those with whom I find it stimulating to engage in *gyan charcha*—the genre through which people sat around wondering what different life a story could lead.

Let me then first lay out the issues relating to the conjunction of the terms ordinary and ethics that I aim to address and that are grouped around the following five clusters of inquiry. I hope to make a case for retaining some indeterminacy and looseness of connections among these clusters as a mode of argumentation, which is particularly suited to the questions at hand.

First, what gives concepts life? Otherwise stated, is there a harmony between the moral vocabularies we use and the worlds we live in?

Second, what are the implications of thinking of moral and ethical life, through the lens of the ordinary?

Third, how is everyday life made to appear given that it is difficult to see that which is before our eyes? How is the temporal structure of potential, actual, and eventual, implicated in our imagination of the everyday?

Fourth, how do we understand the modality of being-with-others as expressed in such unremarkable everyday features as the triadic structure of the grammatical person and number?

Finally, what does it mean to think of ethics as an expression of life taken as a whole rather than to privilege dramatic moments of breakdown or ethical dilemmas as the occasions for ethical reflection? How do we understand the working out of such moments in the domestic and daily contexts?

The connecting arc on which these clusters of inquiry might be arranged is simply that of asking what conceptual, methodological, theoretical work must we do to make ethical life in the everyday visible? How might we remove the air of obviousness with which the everyday is approached in much anthropological writing?

ALIGNING OUR CONCEPTS WITH OUR LIVES; OR WHAT GIVES CONCEPTS LIFE?

At a 2013 GDAT debate (the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory) on the motion, "There is no such thing as the good" (see Mair and Venkatesan 2015), I opened the discussion in support of the motion with the following words:

At the outset I wish to state clearly that the debate, as I see it, is not about the metaphysical question of whether something like "the good" exists. We have already managed to perform the magical tricks of conjuring lots of things in anthropology—nature, humanity, society—and then making them disappear. Let us then leave questions about existence to theologians and metaphysicians—and, instead, ask what kinds of discursive regimes are enabled when we name something as "the good," a value that is made to stand apart from the flux and flow of everyday life and bestowed with a thing like quality. My colleague Hayder Al-Mohammad and I will show that in supporting this motion we are contesting precisely the temptation to separate out and name what is a normal stance people take in their attentiveness toward each other, and then to perform a baptism that will create boundaries around "the good" arrogating to anthropology the right to judge the behavior of others, good intentions not withstanding. (Das 2015b: 4)

Right after the remarks by the chair at the conclusion of the debate, Jonathan Mair asked what was probably on the minds of many members of the audience: "I wonder if all of you could outline briefly, in relation to the arguments you made in your respective speeches, how would you define the good?" (see Mair and Venkatesan 2015: 26).

Since the urge to think of concepts as somehow bounded through definitions is a common temptation in our thinking and our pedagogy, as if we would fall into a vertigo if we (we, the anthropologists, we the kind of persons who care about these things) did not know in advance what the boundaries of a concept, such as the good, or the bad, or the ethical, or the moral, are—it might be useful here to first lay out the ways we might think differently of concepts in general. With regard to our concerns with ordinary ethics, it is particularly salient to think of (a) what it is to live with concepts, and (b) what does it mean to say that concepts have life.

To live with concepts

I take some help from Ludwig Wittgenstein in formulating the issues here by first thinking of concepts as belonging to the normal way in which we go about our everyday life and then thinking of what gives them life.[2] In explaining the

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2. I should clarify here that many anthropologists use words that have a Wittgensteinian ring—words like ordinary, language, practices, agreement—without quite comprehending either the depth of his discussion or paying attention to the play

significance of the "normal case" Wittgenstein clarifies his remark in paragraph 142 *of Philosophical investigations* by adding as an aside, "What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature; such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality" (Wittgenstein 1968: 56). Paragraph 142 to which this note is appended speaks of the characteristic expressions of pain, fear, or joy as well as such quotidian procedures as putting the lump of cheese on the balance and fixing its price by the turn of the scale as examples of concepts. The general facts of nature here are that lumps of cheese do not grow or shrink for no obvious reason and hence we can assume that this procedure that the shop owner follows forms the natural background of our lives—it does not stand in need of justification. It is so with characteristic cries of pain—as I have stated in my earlier work, my response to the expression of your pain is not about cognitive or intellectual certainty but about a feeling of rightness in the response elicited—the response reveals what stakes I have in our lives together (Das 2007).

Yet in intellectual discussions we often feel impelled to try to fix the boundaries of concepts—e.g., how do I know if you are really in pain or just feigning it? How much pain? (This might be the right question for my surgeon to ask me but not for my lover, or my mother, when they see my tearful face.) Does the concept of pain have fixed boundaries? Is the ability to feign pain part of

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of different voices, especially in his later texts. Thus Wittgenstein uses the idea of the ordinary but that has little to do with the ordinary language philosophy of the Oxford School; similarly the idea of agreement in Wittgenstein is not agreement in opinion but agreement in form of life—concepts do not stand in a transcendental relation to the forms of life but are grown within these. Sandra Laugier (2011, 2013) gives the clearest exposition of how the notion that we as humans have a life *in* language touches on a very different register of such terms as agreement than the idea that language is external to the subject and that we use it as an object, among others. Jarrett Zigon (2014: 748), for instance, states, "With its roots in the writings of Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, and today most famously advocated by Stanley Cavell, ordinary language philosophy claims that philosophical problems are in fact linguistic problems." But in fact, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language compels an inquiry into the ways forms are stitched to life and thus remake our notions of what is ordinary, what is extraordinary, what is convention and how our expressions and actions are always in danger of falling apart (see also Das and Han 2015)—the assumption that these issues are "linguistic problems" on the model of linguistics is completely off the mark from my point of view and misses the very structure of *Philosophical investigations* and its tone (see also Travis 2006).

the concept of pain? Could vagueness be the normal characteristic of concepts when we take them out of highly controlled text book situations—e.g., let x be a random binomial variable with . . . ?

Why are these examples important for thinking of ethics? Speaking about the vagueness of concepts, R. M. Sainsbury (2002) argues that the assumption that concepts, like sets, have sharp boundaries fails us precisely at the moment when moral issues are at stake. In some debates about abortion, for instance, he says, one can feel a real sense of shock at the realization that there is no set of persons with close boundaries: the concept person is vague at just that relevant point (as it is with regard to the question of whether corporations are persons within the purview of the first amendment of the US Constitution). In his words, "The difficulty is that moral concepts are often boundary-drawing (especially so the more naïve the morality), and legal concepts typically have to be. Trying to tie the application of a boundary-drawing concept (as who may legitimately be aborted is supposed to be) with a boundary-less one like who is a person poses a problem which is simply not solvable in the straightforward terms in which it is often posed"(Sainsbury 2002: 72).

Wittgenstein's exhortation that we think of concepts as normally having blurred edges (paragraph 71) illustrates what blurred edges might mean through the performance of a very ordinary act such as pointing to a spot. Taking the voice of Frege as his critic, Wittgenstein asks "But is a blurred concept a concept at all?" He then proceeds with this example: "Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything with it.—But is it senseless to say, "Stand roughly there'—Suppose I was standing with someone at the city square and said that. As I say it, I do not draw any kind of boundary at all but perhaps point with my hand—as if I were indicating a particular spot."

We notice that the concept of area in this example is made to appear through the normal activities of embodied beings who have hands and fingers and can point to a spot to say "stand here," "stand there"—the concept of a boundary ceases to be of interest for it serves no real need here. (This is why though both Wittgenstein and Frege speak of unfolding of a concept, each has a different picture of what that entails.) Moving ahead to pages 203 and 204 of *Philosophical investigations*, we find the compelling idea that when we think of concepts as procedures or characteristic expressions we live with or that grow out of life, we don't *choose* them through a set of possibilities—rather as Wittgenstein says,

a concept forces itself upon us. When shown a line drawing of a rudimentary face and asked what you see, the answer, "this is a face," is given at once, not treated as one among several possibilities. Even if one thinks of the picture the first time as this and then as that, it is difficult, Wittgenstein says, to think of it as a question of fixing the concept. Of course one might say that in a different context, say, you are examining a patient with a neurological disorder in which your patient does not recognize faces—then, one might say that the need for defining the boundaries of a concept do arise. Concepts in this formulation are not embodied in words, or not in words alone, but might either be embodied in any kind of linguistic equipment (words, sentences, texts) or in the background of things that make ordinary procedures through which life with the other is lived, possible. I argue thus it is the internal relation that language as a whole (including gestures and physiognomy of words) bears to the world that provides the soil from which concepts are grown. This means that instead of thinking of a specialized vocabulary that draws boundaries around the notion of the moral or the ethical—all the grids on which moral theory is seen to move—it might be important to think of the ways in which ethics is embedded in what Wittgenstein called the whirl of organism.[3] Sometimes ethical moments may come up in intensified forms when, for instance, someone impulsively reaches out to pull a stranger away from a dangerous situation she has failed to notice, such as a car speeding by; at other times someone might give shelter to an endangered person in a riot or in other scenes of violence without being able to say why he or she did it. Explanations might be put on these acts later—but at that point the course of action might simply force itself on one similar to the way a concept forces itself on us in Wittgenstein's rendering.

A further thought of Wittgenstein that also holds an important place in Stanley Cavell's (1979) arguments about our life in language is that we learn to project words in new situations and in so doing we not only learn the nuances

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3.   Reflecting on what picture of thought animates anthropological work, Anand Pandian (2015) offers a remarkable story of the return of a king to a parched land, the role that the anthropologist plays in this return, and the manner in which a space for this event has already been made in the ongoing stories told by the villagers to which the anthropologist simply lends his body and his labor, so to say. "These stories, in other words, may indeed be interpreted as reflections of a particular way of thinking in this part of the world, in their shared grammar of words and relations. But they may also be taken to present the nature and capacities of a mode of thinking in relation to he vicissitudes of ordinary life. We find here a picture of thought as an event among the events of the world" (Pandian 2014: 271).

of our language but also the nuances of the world. Showing how one comes to know what a concept is, Wittgenstein says, "One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way" but then adds the caution that it would be a serious misinterpretation to assume that one is supposed to see in these examples a common thing that eluded the speaker. The task, he says, is to show by means of examples how one is to go on with the concept: "Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means for explaining—in default of a better one. For any general definition can be misunderstood too. The point is that *this* is how we play the game [I mean the language game with the word game]" (Wittgenstein 1968 paragraph 71).

Thus, for Wittgenstein, concepts acquire life in the give-and-take of ordinary life.[4] He proposes that, "what one means by 'thought' is that which is *alive* in the sentence; that a sentence would be a mere sequence of sounds or written shapes without this quality of life that animates it" (Wittgenstein 1967: paragraph 143). In the same paragraph, an analogy between circulation of words and circulation of money suggests that words that have gone dead are like paper money that cannot be used in the way in which real money can be used because there is no one to receive these words or these coins.[5] Independent of someone else's ability and willingness to receive words as meaningful when they are thus projected in new contexts, they might have meaning but they do not have life.[6]

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4. As Raimond Gaita (1990) reminds us, the most fundamental point of Wittgenstein's legacy is that we cannot purify our concepts of their embeddings in human life without being left with only a shadow play of the grammar of serious judgment.

5. Consider the resonance in Bhrigupati Singh's (2014: 183; 2015) description of the conceptual work that the concept of *lebo-debo* (give and take) or *mann* (desire/weight) performs in the speech genre of *gyan charcha* (discussion relating to knowledge) in the everyday contestations with Bansi Maharaj, a colorful figure of a holy man, equally revered and equally suspected as a fraud in Shahbad, the site of Singh's fieldwork.

6. See also Veena Das (2014a: 285) for a discussion of the way projection finds its limit. Thus it is appropriate to project the verb "feed" from feeding the child to feeding the meter to feeding someone's pride, but not feeding someone's love, since love is not seen as the kind of emotion that grows through flattery. Similarly the appropriateness or rightness of a word in a particular context is not simply a matter of social convention. I might be able to say "I mistakenly stepped on the child" but as Austin reminded us, we do not normally say, "I inadvertently stepped on the child" for that is not the way human adult bodies are seen as aligned to children's bodies. For a discussion of the theme of the mutual absorption of the natural and the social into each other as a characteristic of everyday life, see Han and Das (2015).

A discussion of ethical life would entail then, not only what words like good or bad mean but also what *we*—the ones who use them—mean by these words and how we show that they matter. When, for instance, I promise to take my child for an ice cream in the evening when I return from work but then tell her that I do not have the time today but that I promise to do so tomorrow, but tomorrow I come up with an urgent deadline, and so must yet postpone the event—I teach her not only the meaning of the word promise but also what it is to promise, how trustworthy is my word, how much she matters to me. In Cavell's thoughtful rendering of this kind of scene of learning, we end up paying far too much attention to the formal evocation of words like "I promise"—say in signing a contract—and not enough attention to the question of how these dispersed forms of action teach us what the moral force of a concept such as a promise is (Cavell 1979: 175).

I ask the reader to bear with me a little longer before I show the relevance of this discussion for understanding the project of delineating what we might mean by ethical or moral ways of living. Paragraph 97 in *Philosophical investigations* is crucial for understanding how concepts are embedded in everyday life. It goes as follows:

> We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, about our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between—so to speak—super concepts, whereas, of course if the words "language," "experience," "world" have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words "table," "lamp," "door." (Wittgenstein 1968: paragraph 97)

If then concepts have vitality this must be drawn from the life they participate in and not from the desire for abstract reasoning alone (there are cases in which abstraction might be at stake within a form of life but this is to be shown in each case). We are asked to step aside from our usual procedures of finding words (or propositions) that are weighty enough to be treated as "super concepts" and then like a net thrown into the swirling waters of life to catch whatever fish we can. Instead, the ethnographic task is to show, in what way concepts of the moral or ethical emerge in life just as the concept of chair might emerge only in relation to new body techniques of sitting, the valuation of the above and the below (sitting on the chair versus sitting on the floor) as

in societies with masters and servants, and the whole apparatus for producing and selling of chairs.[7]

I can see two objections that might immediately be raised. The first is that anthropologists follow their informants and the words they choose to privilege are those that have salience in the societies they study—*dharma,* face, *mandala,* sovereignty, charity, goodness, sacrifice, for instance. It would be argued that treating these words as surveyable is what provides a clue to what is the locus of value in a particular society. Thus the kinds of logical procedures I critique following Wittgenstein are, some will argue, precisely not the way concepts are traced in ethnographic work. Second, it might be argued that thought emerges in moments when we step away from the thick of experience (Jackson 2014)—thus, it may be said that I have not distinguished sufficiently between thought and being (or transcendence of concepts versus immersion in experience). For many, thought requires concepts that transcend the particularities of everyday life for that stepping aside alone makes it possible to engage in any comparative project.[8] These are important considerations and I will attend to them here and elsewhere in the lecture. For now I note that one way to answer these objections is to show how the concern with the ethical as a kind of sensibility can be shown by disclosing concrete experiences, scenes of instruction in everyday life, as embedded in a moral imagination. Not a single word about the good or the ethical might have been uttered in these scenes of the everyday, and yet they reveal the

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7. A critique of reasoning through the use of super concepts does not mean that I am opposed to "scientific rationality" as one reader of this text surmised. Rather it is to argue that what form scientific reasoning will take is not unrelated to the form of life within which such procedures as calculating, measuring, writing scientific papers take place. As Wittgenstein remarked it is not accidental that mathematicians do not come to blows on the question of whether the results of a particular procedure change between morning and night. If we found a society in which scientists based their experiments on this basis we would not just say that they are wrong—we would have to ask, do they perhaps have a different idea of what is calculus?

8. One might be reminded here of the distinction often made between emic and etic concepts that might be related to but cannot be mapped fully on the distinction between conscious and unconscious models that Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) made with regard to the study of social structure. In the former case concepts were often treated like words while in the latter case what was at stake was the demonstration of an arrangement. I hope the reason why I do not so much reject these distinctions as go around them will be clear as we proceed, but I might signal here that the idea of concepts as these emerge within a form of life shows them to be not simply intellectual tools but as criteria that make everyday life possible.

concern with life as a whole to be embodying ethical sensibilities. I take one example from Sylvain Perdigon's (2015) compelling ethnography of everyday life in the Palestinian refugee camps in Tyre, Lebanon, to illustrate this point.

During his fieldwork Perdigon was puzzled by a particular paradox. He had meticulously shown the economic strains under which families in Tyre functioned and yet when asked about the experience of poverty, people denied that that their life as a whole could be described as "poor." T., an interlocutor in the field, related a specific set of educational scenes when asked how she had grasped the meaning of poverty as a young child. Here is one scene—call it a scene of instruction—that Perdigon describes:

> She speaks of seeing her older brothers, and her mother, hardly containing emotions frightful to her while politely declining gifts of clothes, money or meat, neighbors and acquaintances would present to the family during Ramadan and the 'eid. . . . She also speaks of learning nuances of sociality and from whom, when and why it was in fact admissible to accept certain kinds of goods offered in the appropriate, subdued manner. For example, it was allowable to receive even second-hand clothes from Husayn, the best friend of her older brother who hailed from the more prosperous camp of Nahr al-Bared in the North, and who was intimate enough to sleep in their house while in Beirut. T. was definitely not as sure of what to do regarding the playful routine of another friend of the boys who on his regular visits to their house would place a coin behind her ear and pretend that the coin was calling her ("T.! Take me, take me!")—up to this day she remembers anxiously interrogating the faces of her mother and older siblings for a cue that was not forthcoming.

Perdigon places these delicate and nuanced scenes of instruction in the general response refugee families gave to questions about poverty by insisting, "for us it is otherwise." This refusal of the "I, Poor" locution thwarts the system of reference on which poverty might only be spoken within the overarching discourses of humanitarian crises or through claims over the state for welfare provisions (Fassin 2012; Han 2012). In Perdigon's words:

> Indeed, their refusal to say "I, poor" seems to stymie the possibility of social justice itself, *if*, that is, we take social justice to require acquiescence to a prior operation whereby one is assigned a location and role relative to a field of social belonging defined from elsewhere. But one can also be attentive, with Gilles

Deleuze (1997), to the radical "democratic contribution" intrinsic to a type of utterances disruptive of the "logic of presuppositions" that makes it possible for a boss to give a command and be obeyed, for a "kind friend" to offer commiseration and advice and be listened to, and even for a rebel to be recognized as such when he defies an order. For Deleuze (1997), the emergence of such a speech genre in the writings of Melville, Musil, Kafka, and others participated of a "morality of life" diagonal to the "morality of salvation and charity" and called into being a "new community, whose members are capable of trust or 'confidence,' that is, of a belief in themselves, in the world and in becoming" (88). It is not the least paradox that *sabr*, this heaven-bound patient endurance that Palestinian women and men say they find in the embodied lifeworld of refugee poverty, might also be one name for just such a belief in the world.

In interpreting such statements not as belonging to the evaluative justifications for one's behavior but as belonging to a more unspecified "morality of life," Perdigon follows Deleuze in thinking of these scenes as enacting a morality that is diagonal to a moral position premised on the promises of citizenship, or in its absence, on promises on international covenants or other such legal technologies. This morality is premised on making dispositions and habits the very substance of a moral way of living and although it can and does draw on religious vocabularies (e.g., *sabr* or endurance in the case of the residents of the refugee camps, bad *karma*s in the case of the inhabitants of the slums in Delhi I studied), these words neither provided stable and consistent moral compass free from any expression of doubt about them, nor did they function as the kind of transcendental super-concepts that Wittgenstein warned against.

The kind of scene of instruction described here, is not unique to Perdigon's ethnography, nor is it the case that dissonances around what it is to be attentive to such regard for others within such constrained circumstances do not surface. Similar descriptions can be found in Clara Han's (2012, 2014) ethnographies of the urban poor in Santiago, Chile, on catching a critical moment in the life of a neighbor and providing wordless support though a quotidian act such as offering a meal to a hungry child whose mother cannot directly ask for food. Slow erosions of such sensibilities are also part of everyday life. Thus, Diana Allan's (2013) remarkable work on refugee life alerts us to the fact that relations between generations can become distant and the political projects of yesterday might seem hollow or empty today, putting severe strains on relations between generations. Instead of tracing moral vocabularies these ethnographies

are acutely attentive to the way ethical concepts are given life and then again, how life might be drained out of these concepts by the insistence on performance of virtues (e.g., suffering with dignity, loyalty to the Palestinian project) from which the subject has become distant and dissociated. Such is the case of wives of prisoners in Gaza (as distinct from martyrs' wives) who have to constantly negotiate suspicion over their conduct as young women with sexual desires, whose husbands are away, and whose actions are closely watched by neighbors and kin for any signs of betrayal to the cause (see Buch Segal 2015, forthcoming).

At the end of this section then, I am led to conclude that an answer to Mair's question about the definition of the good cannot be given—a similar sensibility is shown in various minimal theologies—*neti, neti*, not this, not this, say the Upanishads. Instead of enumerating qualities that would define the good, the best course might be to proceed with examples as Wittgenstein's reflection on concepts urges us to do. As we shift the focus of our attention to how any concepts, including ones through which we try to catch a sense of the ethical, emerge in the give and take of life, we may shift the focus of our inquiry to ask, instead, what gives moral concepts life?[9]

The lives of the moral concepts; or the harmony between words and worlds

In a classic paper on the relation between life and concepts Cora Diamond (1988) asks what is it to lose one's concepts? She takes the concerns of Elizabeth Anscombe (1958), who argued that the notions of "moral ought" or "moral obligation" might persist as words with a kind of atmosphere that clings to them but the divine law conception of morality that was needed to give substance to these concepts had disappeared. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) also famously argued that the language and the appearance of morality persist in the contemporary world, even though the context in which the moral notions could be significant have disappeared. For MacIntyre, whose work is rightly regarded as a particularly powerful critique of modernity, the words we had from earlier moral vocabularies are still used with conviction but because the background intelligibility conditions within which they made sense have disappeared, they

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9.   By using the term "moral concepts," I do not wish to commit to any notion that there is a separate domain of life demarcated as "moral"—rather I am taking the notion or moral as a placeholder around which a description might be organized.

do not have any content. MacIntyre's contention that the narrative unity of life that tradition produced has disappeared under modernity has had a tremendous impact on scholars who have then tried to rediscover the concept of tradition as it orients one's life toward practices such as the cultivation of piety through disciplines of the body (Mahmood 2004). The question that might be raised with regard to these attempts is the extent to which we can separate domains of "tradition" as autonomous from an overarching "modernity" that reinscribes the notion of tradition within itself. Would one say that the creation of a Muslim identity that excludes the Ahmadis in Pakistan based on copyright law is an example of the ways concepts can be meaningfully projected and hence shown to have a life as they expand the domains of tradition? Or, alternatively, is this a case where moral fictions are created to cover over the gaps between experiences and concepts we have at hand (see Khan 2012)?[10] It is no one's case that concepts could be laid over a stretch of experience or that we can come to know the real by the layering of a system of names against a system of objects. Yet the question of how to think of the harmony between our concepts and our world, each implying the other, is a pressing issue and goes beyond a listing of virtues that can be named and treated as significant concepts of a given tradition.

Consider now a different but related scene in which words from older moral vocabularies circulate in a weak sense but cannot be used with conviction because the world has changed and so we are unable to make intelligible our experiences or actions to ourselves. Diamond (1988) cites cultural critic Duke Maskell and sociologist Robert Bellah (and his coauthors) who argued for the English and North American case respectively, that the words that used to work to express the moral and political commitments of people are not in harmony with the worlds they now inhabit (see Maskell 1985; Bellah et al. 1985). In Diamond's elegant phrasing, either the moral concepts go unnamed or they are misnamed—language is not so much dead as gone to sleep.

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10. "In harnessing the language of copyright and trademark to the Ahmadi question, it [the court] was making much more apparent that the intent of these transgressions, that is the unlicensed use of titles, texts, modes, and spaces of worship was willful deception" (Khan 2012: 1114). In other words, the Ahmadis could not call their places of worship "mosques" because that would transgress against copyright law— as if a question (i.e., is the Ahmadi claim to being Muslim a violation of Islamic principles?) could not be answered through theological reasoning by the ullama but could be answered by taking resort to copyright law.

I will return in a later section to Diamond's radical reformulation of this issue of the harmony between the moral vocabularies available to us and the textures of our worlds by a reformulation of the notion of the human (i.e., human not in the sense of the place it occupies in humanitarian discourse or the picture of the human as a given) but for now I want to ask if any discussion of ethics or morality requires us to think of what moral vision of the world we have.

Few would doubt the influence that Kantian theory has exerted on the discussion of moral principles both in philosophy and in anthropology, even when critics have faulted it for its insistence on rationality to the exclusion of emotion or its assumption of the subject as sovereign. To take but one example, in his recent magisterial study of ethics, Keane gives a definition of ethical life "to refer to those aspects of people's actions, as well as their sense of themselves and of other people [and sometimes of entities such as gods or animals] that are not in turn defined as the means to some further ends" (2015: 4).

One might ask here if giving this definition of ethical life—its emphasis on treating values as ends in themselves—presumes a particular moral picture of the world and whether it can be used as a universal definition within which variations can be fitted as local adaptations or applications. I owe my formulation of these issues to Dieter Henrich's (1992) perceptive essay on the role played by a moral image of the world in the Kantian conception of moral action. Initially, Henrich argues, it would seem that the agent and the moral principle that regulates his conduct (the masculine pronoun is taken from Henrich's discussion) seem independent of any particular conception of the world. After all, we could posit that notions of moral actions arise because the agent is seen to exercise freedom with regard to his actions regardless of any particular moral picture of the world. Freedom consists in the minimal condition that in most cases one could have acted otherwise. Further, Henrich argues, it is always possible to question oneself about why one should act in a particular way and thus to justify or to doubt the validity of any given moral claims. But this argument further implies that the agent will have beliefs about the nature and sources of his conduct. "If this is so," argues Henrich, "we can also attribute to him beliefs about the world within which he acts and tries to actualize his intentions" (1992: 4). These beliefs must be consistent with the moral agent's viewpoint and further, if there are conflicting conceptions of the world, then they must either be related in a way as to avoid anarchy and confusion—or the moral agent must be able to establish the superiority of his worldview over that of the conflicting versions.

In his further discussion Henrich (1992) shows that the underlying concept of a moral image of the world plays a key role in Kant but that the architectonics of the system undergo important changes in his thought. For our purposes the questions might be restated as follows: In a Kantian inspired morality, what are the principles by which one can effectively distinguish between the morally good and the morally bad? What would motivate a rational enlightened being to follow these principles? A problem that any moral agent would be besieged by, for Henrich as for much of theology, is the problem of the disproportionate distribution of luck and the problem of unjustified suffering in the world. For both Kant and Rousseau, this problem of theodicy made it necessary to conceive of another order different from the empirical order—which could be the order of a divine impersonal law or that created by a personal God—to redress this imbalance. In the absence of such a transcendental order, the positing of a moral order for the empirical world would seem to become an illusory one since it cannot, in itself, redress the imbalance between goodness and unjustified suffering, alluded to earlier. Without going into further details, I will simply state that while Kant's architectonics gave some place to the pursuit of happiness as the motivation for acting morally initially, this was later replaced by the notion that it is an intrinsic or primordial respect for the moral law that motivates humans to act according to moral principles. Thus moral law imposes a condition upon all our strivings for happiness—it does not ask us to abandon the hope for happiness but rather replaces happiness coming from desire for particular objects (or persons), however procured, by a more generalized happiness as available for an enlightened rational person when she acts within the bounds of the moral law. While Kant is not invested in any ontological proof for the existence of God, a unified moral image of the world seems like a constitutive condition for the intrinsic respect for moral law that Kant posits as a basis for purposeful moral action.

I am not attracted or competent to pursue the metaphysical stakes of Kant's notion of the moral image of the world and its implications for moral action. Speaking within an anthropological register, what strikes me is that we are asked to simply trust the promise of the moral law—that in the end it will give us happiness because we will be aligned in a moral sense with a world that is overall a benign one. One might ask, however, what might sustain this trust in the moral image of the world as a whole? We shall see that this picture of moral action that settles the disorders of desire by placing them into the domain of lawful pursuits is resonant with many theories of the moral (and not only in

Western philosophy) as much as it is interrogated by those whose lack of trust in a benign world and a just overall order grows concepts of the moral and the ethical that might be quite different or diagonal to this conception; or else, one might even just settle for a moderate amorality as a way of sustaining life against many odds.

One could offer many examples of how belief in an ultimate moral order has been questioned by victims of the many disasters of the twentieth century that have been documented in the social sciences and humanities. Are we then living in a world in which, as Emannuel Lévinas (1988) argued, reason has become detached from all ethics? What meaning can religiosity or human morality retain in the face of the fundamental malignancy spread across the twentieth century evidenced in the rise of Hitlerism, Stalinism, Cambodia, he asked? Lévinas then proclaimed that this (twentieth) century marks the end of theodicy and asked if we can find meaning through some other means in the face of the massive human suffering produced by the idolatry of the real, and by a reason that has run amok?

My own answer to this issue has been to turn to another way of thinking of life—what I called (as discussed earlier) a descent into the ordinary (Das 2007; see also Brandel 2015 for an understanding of descent as a picture of thought). This is not because I think the ordinary has redemptive qualities in itself—indeed one of my concerns has been to show how forms of life contain within their womb forms of death—but because I am moved by the work performed on the ordinary in what Cavell called "allowing life to be knit itself together, pair by pair" (Cavell 2007). This is a vision different from one that puts its faith in any grand projects of redemption. It compels me to turn to a register of life that I call "ordinary ethics." I offer no guarantees that ordinary ethics provides any solutions to the kind of malignancies that I noted but it describes one modality of being in the world in relation to these malignancies; as an anthropologist I feel that making the effort to describe what such as ethics entails, how the small quotidian acts stand up to the horrific, is one way I can keep fidelity with the people I have worked with over the last three decades.

THE LENS OF THE ORDINARY

As a way of taking these thoughts forward let me start with the idea of the ordinary as the kind of concept that Wittgenstein was alluding to when he

urged us (his readers) to think of concepts becoming as unremarkable as chairs, and tables, and lamps—a point we discussed earlier in the context of his critique of super-concepts. But we might then ask: where would we look for the ordinary—does the ordinary always have the *appearance* of the ordinary? There are two thoughts here that I want to pursue—first, that the distinctions that we make between the ordinary and the extraordinary are sometimes the result of what Wittgenstein called "grammatical illusions"[11] or "superstitions" (Das, forthcoming); and second, that the notion of the ordinary takes us to an important characteristic of everyday life—viz., that its very ordinariness makes it difficult for us to see what is before our eyes. Hence we need to imagine the shape that the ordinary takes in order to find it—this could be the shape of the ordinary as the domestic, or as the neighborly, or as having the rhythms of the diurnal in the form of repetition. Depending on how we conjure the everyday, the threats to the everyday will also be seen in relation to this picture of the ordinary. If, for instance, we take marriage and domesticity as providing us with the image of the ordinary, then the threats might be seen through doubts about the fidelity of the partner (e.g., in *Othello*); if we see the ordinary as habitation within a world in which we dwell in a taken-for-granted way as an animal lives in its habitat, then the threat might be seen as our existence becoming ghostly (*Hamlet*), losing that natural sense of belonging (Cavell 1987); if the everyday is seen in terms of a precarious order secured through contract between warring men (Hobbes), then the threat will appear as the sexualization of the social contract (the figure of the abducted woman as analyzed in Das 2007).[12] Framing all these pictures of the everyday is the idea that everyday is a site on which the life of the other is engaged. Another way of expressing this thought is that it is "being-with" (in actuality or in imagination) that define for us humans, a mode

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11. Grammar here refers to "philosophical grammar" or the way criteria tell us what an object or emotion or rule is within a form of life. "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is" (Wittgenstein 1968; paragraph 373). For further elaboration, see Das (1998; Han and Das 2015).

12. See Cavell (1987) for a full discussion on how the problematic of skepticism is inherited in Shakespeare's plays—thus how literature gives expression to the problem of skepticism. I have argued that the sense of everyday as also a scene of trance and illusion comes in many forms in the anthropological literature (Das 1998, 2007, 2014a)—a theme I carry forward in this section.

of being in the world—and hence of ways in which we inhabit the social and flee from it (Al-Mohammad 2010).[13]

Grammatical illusions, superstitions, and the extraordinary

Let me turn to the first thought I mentioned—viz., that we are sometimes led to bestow or add excitement to actions that might in themselves be quite banal when seen from within a form of life, yet take on an air of something extraordinary, in need of explanation or action or judgment from outside it. Wittgenstein called the tone of voice through which these feelings are produced as "superstitions" as distinct from simple mistakes or errors. This region of the crossing of the ordinary and the extraordinary becomes quite important in our relations to others who are seen to not share our criteria of what we take to be the common sense of our lives together.[14] Following this idea, we might ask what does it mean to make a place for the other in our form of life? In turn these issues lead us to ask: Do forms of life have boundaries? And if so, what is the nature of these boundaries? What implications do these boundaries have for thinking of ordinary ethics? As I have argued in some detail elsewhere (see Han and Das 2015) Wittgenstein does not imagine that there are boundaries around a form of life that correspond to a particular culture; rather, as his example of our language being like a city that has older quarters and new suburbs shows, he

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13. I should perhaps clarify in the light of a comment made by an anonymous reviewer that such a characterization is neither a critique of rationality nor a picture of holism. Rather, it is a picture of the social, expressed as a being-with. See the following note for further clarification.

14. I am not making the case that we are immune from such doubts about the place of the intimate other in our lives, but such doubts about those who are closest to us and yet might one day show themselves to be alien take a different form. I take Heidegger's unwieldy term Dasein to refer to the fact that the form our existence might take is not given in advance and a word like the human might lead to the false notion that we are already satisfied in our knowledge of what humanity is. I hope that it will be clear that for the anthropologist, the "other" is not a theological, abstract term but encompasses different forms of otherness that include acknowledging the existence of the concrete other in one's life. How these issues of the other imagined as wholly other, or one who is my neighbor, or even one who could be me, intersect with each other in imagination and in actuality is where questions of ethics, morality, and politics emerge for the anthropologist (see Das 2014b).

sees the forms of life as extending or contracting in part by the manner in which humans and nonhumans act on the world.

In several places in his *Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough, Wittgenstein (1987) urges us to turn our glance from the primitive to ourselves when we read about the feelings of dread that the traces of fire festivals are said to evoke in us. Wittgenstein asks: was Frazer talking about the primitive men and their practices or about himself? Would the excitement attributed to the "primitive mind" disappear if we were to see the connections between our forms of life and those that he describes for the "primitive" or the savage man? Consider the opening passages of *The golden bough* in which Frazer sets the scene:

> Who does not know Turner's picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi—"Diana's Mirror," as it was called by the ancients. No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it. The two characteristic Italian villages which slumber on its banks, and the equally Italian palace whose terraced gardens descend steeply to the lake, hardly break the stillness and even the solitariness of the scene. Diana herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild. In antiquity this sylvan landscape was the scene of a strange and recurring tragedy. In order to understand it aright we must try to form in our minds an accurate picture of the place where it happened; for, as we shall see later on, a subtle link subsisted between the natural beauty of the spot and the dark crimes which under the mask of religion were often perpetrated here, crimes which after the lapse of so many ages still lend a touch of melancholy to those quiet woods and waters, like a chill breath of autumn on one those bright September days "while not a leaf seems faded." (Frazer 1922: 1)

How is the extraordinariness of the landscape and our feelings that the calm waters and the green hollows of the Alban hills are suffused by the half remembered "dark crimes" committed under the "mask of religion" created here? How has the ordinariness of the landscape been bestowed with such extraordinary qualities as a chill breath of autumn on a bright September day?

Here is how Wittgenstein thinks how the feeling of some dreadful past is evoked. The second remark from his *Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough tries to take away the excitement that has been falsely added: "When Frazer begins

by telling us the story of the King of the Woods at Nemi, he does so in a tone that shows that something strange and terrible is happening here. However, the question 'why is this happening,' is essentially answered by just this [mode of exposition]: because it is terrible. In other words, it is what appears to us a terrible, impressive, horrible, tragic, etc. that gave birth to this event [or process]" (Wittgenstein 1987: remark 2).

The connections that Wittgenstein urges us to see are between the feeling that something terrible has happened here, and the *tone* that Frazer uses to describe it.[15] The tone of excitement obscures from view that words like ghosts and spirits and souls through which the feeling of dread and the uncanniness of primitive rituals is created are part of our normal English vocabulary and that such words at hand create the possibility of mutual translatability. Not only is this true of words but also of gestures. In kissing the picture of our beloved, or assuming that confessing a sin might absolve us from its consequences in the eyes of God, we are not picturing the beloved being there in the picture or our sins being dragged out of us physically—so why would we attribute such beliefs to the primitive man or his performance of rituals of the fire festivals? "Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of a loved one. This is *obviously not* based on a belief that it will have a definite effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at some satisfaction, and does achieve it, too. Or rather, it does not *aim* at anything; we act in this way and then feel satisfied" (Wittgenstein 1987: remark 9).

What I take from this remark is that the familiar word "ghost" gestures to the fact that an understanding derived from the common background of our lives as humans is implicated in the description of "savage" customs. The fact that Frazer can use such words at hand as "ghosts" and "shades" connects our lives to that of the so-called savages—their customs can be imagined within our form of life as a "human" form of life. If, on the other hand, someone had reported that the savage belief is that their own heads simply fall off the body when they kill an enemy (and are put back when the need arises) we would not know how to relate to such a description and would consider that we were, perhaps, not of

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15. One might compare the discord created between sound and image through their juxtaposition in cinematic experience (Dale 1965) and the manner in which it can create a sense of impending danger though the image in itself might carry no such suggestion.

the same flesh, or that their ideas of what are heads and where they belong in the body are perhaps in need of a completely different description.

We now come to the heart of the matter, which is this: granted that some customs or habits or ritual actions performed by the "other" will seem strange or even sinister, could one take away this feeling of something being completely alien to us by imagining the possibility that these connect with things we do habitually? Would that take away the false excitement that Frazer has added to these customs or procedures as somehow violating the sense of what is natural to the human in one's own corner of the world? There are many places in *Philosophical investigations* where we learn what it means to think of harmony between thought and world—I take a leap from that to say that I can see a path toward imagining that creating a space of possibility for the other is itself a mode of living ethically. In paragraph 448 of *Philosophical investigations* Wittgenstein talks about the sentence, "I have no pain in my arm," to ask, in what sense does my present painless state *contain* the possibility of pain? And now we can understand the importance Wittgenstein attributes to the fact that Frazer uses words like ghost or shade—words that already have a home in our language and thus enable us to see the connections between us and an "other" however far we might be in terms of social conventions because a space of possibility has been prepared through which we can project bits and pieces of our life (or my life in a particular corner of humanity I inhabit) to include some aspects of the life of the other.

Two ethnographic examples

I am extending what is a very precious thought in Wittgenstein—viz. how might we bring harmony between our words and our worlds given that truth is not a matter of fitting propositions to reality as if they were made for each other (as gloves are made for hands)? If we picture the everyday as the site where I engage the life of the other with all its threats and possibilities, what purchase does the idea of harmony between language and world have? How does ordinary ethics and its denial look within this picture of the everyday?

I first take an ethnographic scene in which the existence of the other is seen as a threat to the survival of one's own way of life and trace how the desire for the psychic annihilation of the other is expressed as a temptation to escape the everyday. I contrast this with a second scene in which a possibility for newness is created by taking a stance in which a discourse, somewhat foreign to the

prevailing one, is absorbed by the metaphor of "overhearing," suggesting that even if one is not a direct addressee of the speech emanating from an elsewhere, could one still participate in it? I hope to make the examples work not to show commonalities between the examples given in my previous discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer and the examples I offer but to demonstrate the force of Wittgenstein's notion that examples help us to see how to go on—here, to go on with the question of how to think of ordinary ethics as engaging the life of the other. Said otherwise, I am trying to release the potential contained in Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer to think of the moral issues that contemporary conditions of living with the other raise.

Fairness and experiencing the other as a threat

In her marvelous book on fairness, class, and belonging in cotemporary England, Katherine Smith (2012) tracks the sense of being excluded, discriminated against, and even disenfranchised among English working class members and how these feelings come to be expressed in relation to their imagination of what Muslim immigrants are able to "extract" from the government.[16] Although Smith is much more interested in seeing how her informants' notions of fairness relate to the discussion of fairness in Rawls and Habermas, her ethnographic intimacy with the people she talked to allows one to see how the expressions they use might be interpreted in the light of the previous discussion of how a space of possibility might be created or denied and its implications for thinking of our lives with the other.

Smith's working class respondents in Halleigh (in the vicinity of Manchester, UK) constantly evoked such expressions as "its not fair," "there is no free speech" in relation to the presence of Muslims in Britain and in their own local communities. Sometimes these expressions were used to express what they felt was preferential treatment given to the Muslims in such matters as bending institutional rules to accommodate their religious beliefs and at other times around an

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16. See also Das (2001) and Hage (1998) for a discussion on how violence against the other might be shot through with an experience of vulnerability of one's own life. Such folding of contradictory affects into each other alert us to the trance-like character of the everyday variously characterized, as *méconnaissance* (Bourdieu 1990), uncanniness (Cavell 1988), or the creation of a subjunctive reality that holds out the hope that life could become other than it is (Seligman et al. 2008; Puett 2014).

unease with the veiling of the face, or not being able to share a sense of humor. On the question of veiling, one informant expressed his unease in the following way: "When we see someone and we are speaking to them, we like to see their faces. It's our way of life here. But they don't respect that. We just have to respect them in our country" (Smith 2012: 94).

Smith describes a more dramatic form of "protest" when Aaron, a young man who wanted to assert his right to free speech, began to wear a balaclava every Sunday to various local pubs on the pretext that it was his "religion." When asked by the landlords to either remove the balaclava or leave, he would shout, "This is my religion!" When asked why he was doing this, Aaron replied that he was carrying on a single-person protest against the fact that Jack Straw, Member of Parliament, had felt compelled to offer a public apology for remarks made when he was Home Secretary in 2006 pertaining to the discomfort he felt when talking to Muslim women who were wearing a *niqab*. Straw had asked them to remove it if they wanted to speak to him or else to choose to speak to a female member of his staff instead of him. In Aaron's words:

> I put on a balaclava. I thought, right, I'm going to make a statement. You know, what if I wore a balaclava on a Sunday. . . . It is my religion. . . . I have known the landlords in these pubs for years, but they have all come up to me and they would say, ". . . you've got to leave unless you want to take that off." I told them, "I'm not taking this off. It's my right to wear this. Its my religion." (Smith 2012: 93–94)

There are other instances Smith describes where informants, both male and female, felt that their sense of what is funny, when is something a joke or when is it an insult, is not shared with the Muslim migrants. Called "having a barter," the insults, quick-witted responses, and cultivating a disposition of "being not too sensitive" or "not taking it personally" were forms through which dyadic relations were maintained and exhibited in this working class neighborhood. As one of the informants explained, "It isn't really insults. Well, it is, but we just like to have a laugh. We just wind each other up (2012: 114–15)?"

We could call the remarks made of the importance of "seeing a face" or "sharing a sense of humor" as forms of quotidian racism through which Muslims are excluded from a shared life. But we might also focus on the way that talking abut Muslims in this way also begins to make what would have been an everyday, unremarkable practice elsewhere—a subject of great excitement, a sense of becoming disjointed with life in this part of working class England—leading to

feelings that there can be no space prepared within this form of life for Muslim others. In Aaron's actions in wearing the balaclava and proclaiming it to be his religion, we can see that there is a parodying of the *niqab*. Yet Aaron seems unable to see that his actions are in the nature of a flight from the everyday—others, including the landlords of the pub recognize this as the parody that it is and thus get him to leave.[17] Might it have been possible for these men and women to imagine a different form of interaction with their Muslim neighbors if they had tried to see what connections they might make with other things there are in their lives—maybe replacing the polarity within which they cast their relations with Muslims by analogies that might allow them to connect (Jackson 1987, forthcoming)? That such connections and analogies are regularly made and that certain words belonging to one tradition can be taken to be simply "words at hand" and used with different inflections across traditions is a common observation in many ethnographies on relations across different religious communities in India (Alam 2004; Chatterji 2012; Das 2010a, 2010b; Henn 2014). It is not that such possibilities of mutual engagement and recognition provide any guarantees against violence but as Bhrigupati Singh (2015) argues, a mode of agonistic intimacy allows those who are locked in conflict at one threshold of life (say, in political contestations) to come together at another threshold of life (say, through practices of spirit possession). It is possible to think of the everyday as holding the potential for continuous transfigurations that can make everyday slights, grudges, betrayals, boredoms turn into lethal conflicts as I have shown in the case of one of the neighborhoods I worked in where years of small jealousies and grudges between members of two different religions and castes (Hindu Chamars and Sikh Siglikars) inhabiting two adjoining streets became a violent orgy of killings as more powerful political actors converted this space into a theater of conflict for national level political confrontations (see Das 2007, chapter 9). Or else, as Fassin (2013) notes for police patrols deployed to keep order in areas where Muslim migrants live in the suburbs of Paris, the boredom of nothing happening can convert into a kind of quotidian

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17. I am not making the point that revealing the trance-like character of his fears will persuade Aaron that his form of life is not under threat by Muslims for it is within the structure of skepticism about the other that it makes it hard to awaken from such a trance. I do want to note, though, that others within his own social world find Aaron to be behaving in a weird fashion, showing that a different sense of what it is to live with these others is also part of the milieu, as Smith's ethnography also shows.

racism in which police end up throwing around random insults and completely inappropriate body searches that could in turn grow into violent riots. Cavell (2007) asks us, social scientists, to consider how these "little deaths of everyday life" might become magnified by standing sources of social enmity—racism, casteism, sexism, elitism? The counterpoint might be that it is in small acts of everyday repair that what looks like a standing possibility of violence can be contained. Singh's (2015) work alerts us to changing rhythms, to the waxing and waning intensities, through which this life of the other is engaged. The recent work of scholars such as Al-Mohammad, Allan, Han, Singh, Perdigon, on which I have drawn extensively in this lecture, makes us acutely aware of the textures of attentiveness in sustaining everyday life in which violence is kept at bay without ever the satisfaction that the problem of violence has been solved once for all.

Wittgenstein's great insight into Frazer's *The golden bough* was that Frazer is unable to see that the feeling of dread that he attributes to the past dark crimes committed by savages is related to his own constricted imagination of the life of the other. This constricted imagination is apparent in Smith's informants who could not see that the Muslim neighbor does not have to fit fully into their lives as they imagine it in order to be part of that life. But there is a flight into fantasy that prevents her informants from seeing what is before their eyes. After all, none of the Muslim women who wore the *niqab* were likely to be hanging around with Aaron in the pub—so his imagination of the threats they posed to his way of being was more a result of what Wittgenstein thought of as "superstition." Smith cites Jürgen Habermas (1990) on value disagreements, which he argues become deliberations about "who we are" and how we evaluate what is a good life. For Smith, Habermas' formulation that we cannot jump out of a particular life history or form of life in which we actually find ourselves—and with which our identities are irrevocably tied up—resonates with what her respondents stated about the anxieties about preserving their forms of life (Smith 2012: 91) But Wittgenstein would alert us to is the fact that a harmony between our words and our worlds is also about being able to imagine the possibility that we could be other than we are (Jackson 2004, forthcoming).

I take Wittgenstein's comparison of our language (and thus our forms of life) to a city that is never finished as evidence of the open character of forms of life though this open character does not mean it is infinitely stretchable. "Our language can be seen as an ancient city; a maze of little streets and squares, of

old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses" (Wittgenstein 1968: paragraph 18).

Elsewhere I have suggested (see Das, forthcoming) that Wittgenstein's remarks of Frazer (especially 27–34) are oriented to make us consider existence as always capable of being more, or other, than its present realizations. For all our worldliness, then, we might never be fully at home in any particular world. It is also the case that as the remark on our language being like a city suggests, the openness of the language one inhabits—that it can have suburbs that are well ordered and streets from old that are like mazes—our worlds are, indeed, open to newness (see also Mattingly 2014). Of course, there are no guarantees that the imagination of this other in my life will work—and not swallow up my confidence that the forms of life itself might not disappear—but it is precisely this uncertainty that becomes the challenge for everyday ethics.

A second example

Let me take a somewhat different example—that of how a new language of human rights is absorbed within a society that considers this language first to be alien but then opens itself to it through aligning its own conventions to the possibility of newness. In his work on human rights in Thailand, Don Selby (2015) traces the trauma in Thai society at the potential of violence within Buddhism, which came to the surface in the brutal suppression and massacre of student demonstrations in 1976 in Bangkok in the course of the democracy movement. For many Buddhists, there was the further trauma of remembering that the killings had been justified by powerful Buddhist monks such as Kulliiowattho Bhikku, who argued that it was meritorious to kill Communists since they were the personifications of Mara—the evil incarnation in Buddhism—whose purpose is to destroy Buddhism. Are the teachings of Buddha then capable of generating such brutal violence? Social conventions did not permit open discussions but Selby suggests that these anxieties were addressed through another language—that of human rights within the institutional spaces of the newly established National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), constitutionally mandated in 1997 and finally constituted in 2001. Selby tracks how initially the language of human rights was treated as something that was simply "overheard," as if the Thai people were not the direct addressees of this

discourse but had come to participate in it through indirect means. However, as complaints from citizens began to pour in and were adjudicated, the language of human rights came to be treated as another potential contained within Buddhism (and not as coming from the West) as they thickened and gathered weight. The traditional institutional mechanisms such as those of face work or of patronage relations were bent and extended to do work for the NHRC (Selby 2012). This is a fascinating example of how a space of possibility for newness was created by reinterpretation of what Buddhism might mean in the context of aspirations for democracy. Selby's comments that even without a proximal scene of devastation an event can occasion a turning back to the ordinary in novel ways (Selby 2012, 2015). He thus thickens the notion of the actual everyday by showing the potential of violence contained within it and tracking how newness might be absorbed within the scene of sameness to address moral disquiet.

Of course not all forms of newness might be absorbed in this way by extending the notion of tradition. Commenting on the aspirations expressed in what many call the Arab Spring, Talal Asad (2015) argues that traditions are plural and dynamic but that the events since 2011 in Egypt show that modern liberal states make it difficult or even impossible to permit certain experiments in the new direction within a particular tradition; Asad's analysis is complex and his conclusions about the possibility of a more just political formation in Egypt are pessimistic. The uprisings in Egypt, he says, expressed an aspiration that cannot be characterized as either "religious" or "secular" because people with religious and secular sensibilities were joined in their efforts to overthrow the old system and make a new beginning, to initiate a "democratic tradition" propelled by a desire that political obligation be founded on loyalty to the nation and not on fear of the state's violence. But as the later violent suppression of the movement as well as the internal dissensions that developed within the movement showed, an aspiration is not a realization. As Asad summarizes these issues,

> Some years later, well after the July 3rd military coup, looking back at the January uprising, it becomes apparent that there never was a "revolution" because there was no new foundation. There was a moment of enthusiasm in the uprising, as in all major protests and rebellions, but the solidarity it generated was evanescent. A hopeful attempt at beginning a tradition never guarantees the hoped for future: clear aims, good judgment, patience, and willingness to learn a new language and

how to inhabit a new body, are required to respond to the various dangers and opportunities that emerge from attempts to found a new political order. (Asad 2015: 8–9)

There are two important points that Asad is making. First, when one thinks of newness in terms of collective political action, it involves tectonic shifts that might be in the nature of slow changes that are not on the surface, and second, it involves the mobilization of energies that go into brining newness at the political level (but these energies are not always durable). Asad seems to acutely feel the failure of the Egyptian uprisings, noting that even among the Muslim intellectuals and leaders he interviewed there was less awareness of what learning a new language might entail such that it could be recognized as both new and Islamic or Egyptian. However, because Asad's essay occasionally collapses the notion of tradition with that of a form of life, he might have underestimated the importance of these moments of heightened intensities within the life worlds and their potential for generating something that might exist for now in the margins of consciousness but might grow later into something yet unthought. Said otherwise, one might ask if even failed political projects leave residues in the form of potential or unfinished stories that might reappear later in new ethical sensibilities in our lives. Thinking then of the everyday in terms of the potential, the actual, and the eventual, should free us from the default position that many scholars often unthinkingly fall into—viz., that the everyday is nothing other than the site for routine, repetition, and acquired habits.[18]

EVERYDAY AS A MODE OF REINHABITING

From thinking of everyday as the place where the life of the other is engaged, I move to the everyday as the space of rehabitation. In a paragraph that I continue to find compelling for my understanding of everyday life, Cavell (1994) dwells

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18. Elsewhere I have tried to put pressure on the idea that habit is simple mechanical repetition, arguing that a more enriched understanding of habit sees it as an intermediary between the pole of the active and the passive in human action and not as a mere residue of repetition (Das 2012; for an excellent discussion on this point see also Hage 2014). I note for now that the opening up of the issue of habit as a creative force has yet to be fully assimilated in anthropological thinking (see especially Ravaisson 2008).

on the abstract conceptual moment in Wittgenstein where he talks about his philosophy having destroyed what was, anyway, a house of cards. Cavell writes, "Could its [i.e., the conceptual moment's] color have been evoked as the destruction of a forest by logging equipment, or of a field of flowers by the gathering of a summer concert, or by the march of an army? Not, I think if the idea is that we are going to have to pick up the pieces and find out how, and whether, to go on, that is go on living in this very place of devastation, as of something over" (Cavell 1994: 74).

The pictures of destruction that are first evoked here suggest that that those whose actions have (willfully or carelessly) destroyed a place of habitation (a forest, a field of flowers) have simply moved on with little regard to what was destroyed, whereas if we are to live in this place of devastation by picking up the pieces, the rubble, and remaking that place, we would need a different picture of what is destroyed in our lives and what it is to pick up the pieces again. I am sure that there are nuances in this passage that I do not fully comprehend but I feel confident enough to state that even when the space of destruction was dramatically present as in the violence of the Partition of India that I tried to document, the space of devastation was not simply the moment of horror but how this was carried forward and made part of that life that was reinhabited by the dwelling again (Das 2007). This is how I rendered the life of Asha, one of the protagonists whose life from some outside perspective might have been seen as rebuilt through a second marriage but for whom this rebuilding was not simply moving on to something new but also entailed a repair of earlier relations that were destroyed by the forces that impinged on her life. The argument I put forward here cannot be stated in terms of a simple contrast between a first-person perspective and a third-person perspective (i.e., from a first-person perspective she had not moved on whereas from a third-person perspective she had remarries and successfully rebuilt her life) but it does require that as ethnographers we do not rush to offer explanations that ignore the question of what mattered to Asha. This theme has been brilliantly formulated by Sandra Laugier (2005) who argues that what matters to one can serve as the touchstone of ethics as finding one's voice, and by Arthur Kleinman (2008) who shows how we might lose our sense of what matters in the plethora of voices that confront us from more abstract discourses on the ethical.

I briefly recapitulate the main points of this story in which the massive sectarian and sexual violence during the Partition of India in 1947 did not register in any direct violence faced by Asha herself but in the fact that her already fragile

position as a widowed daughter-in-law of a Hindu family became unsustainable with the death of her husband's elder sister and the impossible desires kindled in the dead woman's husband for her as well as her own uncertainty over what kind of betrayal would it be for her to surrender to these desires (see Das 2007, chapter 4). I described this unraveling of relations as "poisonous knowledge" and described both her dramatic contracting of another marriage (unheard of then for widows of upper caste families) and her patient cultivation of continued relations with the women of her first husband's family. I conveyed the devastation of her everyday life in the following way: "There was the poisonous knowledge that she was betrayed by her senior affinal kin as well as her brother, who could not sustain the long term commitment to a destitute sister. *What was equally important for her* was the knowledge that she may have betrayed her dead husband and his dead sister by the imagination of infidelity, and made a young child, her 'special' adopted son, feel abandoned" (Das 2000: 222).

Fifteen years ago I interpreted Asha to have made a "choice": "Once her sexual being was recognized in the new kind of gaze—someone in the position of a surrogate brother revealing himself to be a lover—she was propelled into making a choice. Would she wish to carry on a clandestine relation and participate in the 'bad faith' upon which Bourdieu (1990) recognizes the politics of kinship to be based? Or would she accept the public opprobrium to which she subjected the family honor for a new definition of herself which promised a certain integrity, although as an exile from the life projects she had earlier formulated for herself" (Das 2000: 221). Fifteen years later it seems to me that if the word "choice" suggests that there were two commensurate alternatives then this was not a good word to have taken to render what she described. Let us listen once again to her words: "I have been very happy, very lucky, that I found someone good to marry me. . . . If jija ji (HZH) had not begun to make passes at me, I might have lived an ascetic life, appropriate to a widow in my husband's house. . . . But after what happened between us, how could I have faced my sister-in-law? How could I have faced my husband in my next life? With him it is a connection for eternity. With my present husband—it is like two sticks brought together in a stormy sea—the union of a moment and then oblivion" (Das 2000: 217).

I must confess that the image she conveyed in these words was uncanny: a lifetime spent with a man who she had looked after, to whom she had borne two children, was like a meeting of two sticks in a stormy sea, simply because she was not his rightful wife in the eyes of god? Surely this is not easy to render as

a "choice" she made if we think that this implies that the alternatives are somehow commensurate or that what is at stake here is to choose between obligation and freedom.[19] There is a moral picture of the world here that also made her own present life somehow opaque to her, and yet in the small acts she performed in keeping fidelity with her sister-in-law and in continuing to visit her "adopted" son with whom she had a special relationship, despite all the veiled insults about her marriage from the same brother-in-law who had awakened her own sexuality, I saw a devotion to the world she could have just as well left behind. Should we just call this the ethics of "being-together" rather than an ethics of the act that can be isolated and judged? In the last fifteen years I have been encouraged by the work of feminist scholars such as Sameena Mulla (2014), who shows exquisite sensibility in her depiction of the weave of life within which victims of rape from African American families improvise and try to construct their own actions within a field of relations that is already marked by many forms of violence. The rape is experienced as one act in a series of other acts, and not the unique, world-destroying act that an outside rendering in law and morality make it to be. In one case, for instance, a woman refused to press charges against an uncle who had a history of incarceration and had raped her because her desire for justice would mean pressing charges and appearing in a court of law, acts that she suspected might unravel a whole set of knotted relations by putting relatives who were providing care of one sort or another within the kinship network before the accusatory eyes of the law.

But just what is it that such attention to women (and men) who struggle to make everyday life inhabitable by withholding themselves from trading accusations, or who swallow the poisonous knowledge of violations big and small,

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19. It should be clear that the target of my criticism here is my earlier self, for I think I fell into the default language of choice. However, the contrast between domains in societies dominated by what Joel Robbins (2007) called a morality of reproduction as distinct from other domains where a morality of freedom prevails gives culture the overarching place in determining the range of freedom available in a society. Much as I appreciate a rehabilitation of Durkheim and of obligations in Robbins, the work on their own culture performed by women like Asha shows that the struggle to find one's voice is not simply divisible into domains of obligation and domains of freedom. Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us that the issue is that the singularity of the actual life lived cannot be absorbed into the idea of the "representative" man or woman (Bakhtin 1993: 77–78). That much social theory since Weber thinks of the ideal type of the individual (say, under Calvinism) as a unit of analysis should not blind us to the fact that the problem of singularity is of a different order than that of the average or the ideal individual type (see Humphrey 2008).

might achieve? Why worry so much about finding just the right expression: Is it choice? Or passivity? Or vulnerability to which all human action is exposed? I believe something is at stake for anthropology in thinking how our words might be aligned to the lives and stories we have been trusted with. Is this a good enough description of what we do as anthropologists? In many ways the very structure of participant observation as a method requires critical patience, acts of waiting, and letting different aspects of a story bubble up, or be offered in one way on one occasion and in another way on a different occasion. However, what it is to pay attention to expression (both that of one's interlocutors and one's own) through such acts of waiting is different from the kind of analysis done when we have "captured" the speech through compilation of recordings and are now analyzing it with techniques of linguistic analysis. For certain purposes when one is analyzing changes in speech patterns, for instance, or comparing regional variations in language use, these techniques serve very well, but I think we need to inquire if such methods do not lead to a retrospective false coherence that a narrative acquires simply because the context of telling has shifted.

There are some interesting criticisms about the mode of doing anthropology through the critical patience of letting a story or several ways of telling a story emerge in bits and pieces that may be worth considering because they bring out some underlying assumptions about our picture of everyday life. Thus, for instance, Michael Lempert (2013) argues that ethical events require communicative labor to happen and are hence precarious achievements and that this complicates the very notion of the ethical that he attributes to me—viz., that the ethical is intrinsic to practice. I have, of course, maintained (or tried to maintain) throughout my work that what Wittgenstein gives us is not simply a theory of practice either in the Marxist sense of praxis or in the sense of Bourdieu's logic of practice. In the work of scholars in the Wittgensteinian lineage, I have argued, the everyday is not simply the world of routines or habits but is shadowed by doubts that can become world annihilating, as I show with my work on rumor. Indeed, even in the snippets of the story of Asha that I gave here, we see everyday life as laced with fantasy, often morphing into a scene of trance. That is why when rendering the lives of my interlocutors I have often reached a point at which I let indeterminacy and uncertainty as to what they mean remain in the text.

What Lempert finds insufficiently specified in my writing is, in my reading of it, a result of another kind of fantasy that Lempert entertains and that shadows his words. It is a fantasy that the other could be made wholly transparent

if only we had enough recording equipment to replace the human ear with the ear of the machine: "Consider Das," he says, "who narrates with eloquence how 'small acts' (Das 2012: 139) can do big things, from care to harm, without ever announcing what they do. This exposes the fragility of ethical events, but *once we scrutinize real time ethical events with recordings and transcripts—as researchers on interaction do*—we can see more vividly just how precarious ethical events are" (Lempert 2013: 371, emphasis added). "I want to dwell," Lempert continues, "on this precariousness and argue that the study of ordinary ethics could do more to illuminate the labor and methods through which actors strain to make the ethical not just effective but intersubjectively evident" (Lempert 2013: 371).

As I hear the words of women like Asha and Manjit and men like Billu and children like Avtar and Vidya—all of whom live in my various writings (Das 2000, 2007, 2012, 2015a)—I read them as having made the space of devastation yet again habitable by working and improvising on how to go on with the very pieces of rubble their lives had become, and thus to allow life to knit itself back, slowly, laboriously, pair by pair. I don't see them as "straining to make the ethical intersubjectively evident." Instead, I find here the stirrings of life: when the survivor of years of torture in an Iranian prison, whose husband had been executed in the same prison finds that she can suddenly fall in love and mind terribly at being forsaken (Talebi 2011) or when survivors of a horrendous genocide can begin to restore lost and broken sacred statues to newly animated Buddhist temples (Guillou 2015). These stirring of life are not "communicative events" that have to be made "intersubjectively evident" as if there was first a private language and then came the event of making it apparent to the other by communicative labor. This is where finding "just the right expression" becomes a matter of not simply communicating but asking what is alive in thought: when would our words show us to be not of the same flesh?

I could not have taken a recorder to Asha or Manjit not only because words came unbidden but also because I felt that these women were not just telling me about events but about themselves—each of them was making herself known. It mattered whether Asha was speaking to me, her friend, or to a machine. Language, as Wittgenstein (1968) said, is a city with an old maze of narrow streets and new suburbs with well laid out streets. I would have to be context-blind (if not soul-blind) to think what was at stake for Asha was simply some kind of communication of an event as in a testimony before a court of law. A tape recorder is not a neutral instrument for me through which one is getting pure unmediated speech—we must ask who the "you" is who is being addressed when

one speaks to a tape recorder or a video camera or a person. This does not make the work done with tape recorders and with mining of big data through capturing the words that circulate on twitter or with hashtags in itself illegitimate, but it does ask that we think of the materiality of mediation in conceptualizing the difference between speech and voice (see Das 2007 and Vogel 2009 for the crucial difference between these registers of language and our relation to it).

Nayanika Mookherjee's (2015) book on the different lives of the stories of *birangonas* (lit. the war heroine), a title bestowed on women who had been raped by Pakistani soldiers or collaborators during the 1971 war of independence in what was then East Pakistan, shows the tortured terrain of the relation between publicity, secrecy, and everyday life. Unlike the stories of rape and sexual violation told within a judicial framework as in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or in court trials, the stories of the four women *birangonas* did not come out in one go. There are contradictory affects with which the term *birangonas* comes to be infused in the local context: are they war heroines to be honored or soiled women (*khota*) to be shunned? Such contradictory affects that Mookherjee encountered in the field served as a warning to her to wait and learn what questions to ask. Thus Mookherjee waited, immersing herself in the daily talks and the everyday socialities of the village. She was sometimes invited by one of the women's husband to visit and hear their story; sometimes others pointed out to a family they felt she should visit and hear about their suffering. After all, a long time had passed between the time of the "incident"—*ghotona*—and the time of the telling. The story had gathered in itself, not only the memory of the original event but also how it was unearthed—"combed," the expression Mookherjee uses repeatedly—by different kinds of actors and traded for different values it carried. Mookherjee's delicacy of touch is visible in the subtle ways she wards off pressure on the women from husbands or friends to "narrate" what happened. She lets the experiences of different kinds of violations (and not by the soldiers of the Pakistani army alone) to seep through the ordinary expressions she finds, sometimes listening to what the women want her to "overhear" and at other times by her attentiveness to expressions that arise unbidden and evoke the sorrow or the terror of being brutally violated.

For the linguist anthropologist used to "capturing" the precise speech through the recording or videotaping equipment and then analyzing it in terms of an elaborate semiotic apparatus, this mode of collecting stories would seem suspect as it does to Lempert. But to the women who were subjected to the glare of media in the commemorative events in 1992 of the *muktijuddho*—the war of

1971, without fully understanding why they had been brought to these events or what their presence was testifying to—it was the tape recorder and a foreigner wishing to record their "testimony" that would have been threatening. The ethics of storytelling here is not easy to discern for the stories that might seem to perform the task of criticism in one domain (say, that of national publicity) might become lethal for the impact they have on the one whose story is being told. Here the bearer of the story is not a generic raped woman but a woman with this kind of family history, this kind of local politics, and it is her singularity that is at issue, not her place in the general scheme of things.

I remember in the context of the Sikh survivors of brutal violence in Sultanpuri, one of the low-income areas in Delhi where I became intimate with many people, a man said to me, "It is our work to cry and your work to listen" (see Das 1991). Though this was an indicative utterance, it carried the force of the imperative to me. The bironganas whose history Mookherjee narrates spoke about giving her the *mela itihash*, the *chorom itihash*—lot of history, severe history. But Mookherjee seems to have known that the burden of carrying this gift was to find a way of speaking with tact, mindful of the fact that their stories were not to be traded through transcripts of recorded interviews but had to be told in a way that was faithful to the double bind of their wanting their stories to be told and not to be told. The ordinary ethics I speak about in this lecture binds the ethnographer and the people she finds in mutually discovering what it is to find one's voice in one's history. It seems the right kind of moment to ask how we might think of the relation between the first person, the second person, and the third person in the scene of everyday life. Otherwise said, how does this triadic structure help us to think what it might mean to align the picture of the world with my world—or in Cavell's signature theme, what is it to find my voice in my history?

THE GRAMMATICAL PERSON AND THE TRIADIC STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Abhinavagupta, the great scholar of the Kashmiri monistic and tantric scholarly traditions, as well as the commentator of Anandavardhan's Dhvanyaloka (ninth century), the inaugural text for a new aesthetic theory in Sanskrit texts, reflects on the triadic structure of reality—*idam sarvam trikarupameva*, everything in this universe is of threefold nature—and uses evidence from the grammatical

structure of nonverb syntax as well as the triadic structure of grammatical persons to interpret the deeper meaning of what it means to be addressed by Shiva. It turns out that it is not only philosophers in the Sansktiric traditions but also modern Western philosophers who see questions of moral obligations embedded in the triadic structure of grammatical persons. I am interested in this section to ask how one might take insights from the discussion on the grammatical person to illuminate the question around which I skirted in the last section – what does it mean to have a first-person perspective on one's life (see Mattingly 2014)? Might we generate ways of thinking why is it important to find one's voice for any understanding of ethical life by taking a first-person perspective? Let me begin, however, not with the first person, but with the second person.

The second-person standpoint

The philosopher Stephen Darwall (2006) defines the second-person standpoint as the perspective you take in relation to me, when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will. These claims from the second-person perspective might be explicit, as in acts of demanding, reproaching, or apologizing; or implicit, as in feelings of guilt and remorse.[20] Darwall develops his theory of the second-person standpoint primarily in relation to normative felicity conditions—i.e., under what conditions will I regard your claims on me to be justified. He gives us two scenarios: one in which the second person who is addressing me can draw upon valid reasons we share which give her authority to address me or demand something from me; and, the second, in which the second person can count on some such emotion as sympathy that makes me respond to the demand. An example of the first case might be the demand that a tax collector might make on me that I pay up; the second might be a beggar who looks at me with beseeching eyes as he thrusts forward an empty rice bowl. In the first case I am obligated to pay because the mutual relations between the tax collector and me in this scene of interaction grow from a contractual framework. The authority of the tax collector comes from our belonging to the same kind of community created through agreement on law. In the second case, I am not obliged to give the beggar anything but I might be moved to do so. I will not go

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20. See also Webb Keane (2015 and this volume) for an acute analysis of grammatical persons—there are points of contact and points of divergence in our analyses that I bracket for now.

into the further intricacies of what Darwall calls the normative felicity conditions (adapting the vocabulary of Austin's performative utterances) but I do note that the second person standpoint in this discussion is about (a) how impersonal rules or contracts are made to carry force in interactive situations; and, (b) how a moral demand might be made on me that stems either from a contractual morality or a noncontractual one that counts on my recognition of the beggar's condition as somehow laying claim over me. However, Darwall makes no room for the fact that in this theater of you and me being face-to-face, a response might just be drawn out of me not because I can offer valid reasons for responding to your demand but something about my being this kind of "human" is at stake. One of the examples Darwall gives about reasons as to of why would someone respond to a request to stop causing pain—say, by removing his foot that is pressing on my foot—is that this act would make the world a better place to be in. My reaction to this example with its Kantian tone is that outside the reified world of philosophy, the normal reaction in such a case would be to just remove the foot perhaps with a mild apology because that is just what we do, unless the idea was to cause deliberate pain, in which case further explanations may be called for.

Is there something mysterious in the reaction that is elicited from someone when, say, one is *moved* to respond to the beggar or when you do not pause to think of offering justifications (even to yourself) as to why you should remove your foot if you find yourself pressing on another's foot, perhaps in a crowded bus? Al-Mohammad explains this by alluding to the relation between norm and normality in the following way:

> Walking down a busy street, we often know how not to bump into one another, right? Erving Goffman says: well, it is because people look at each other, they are glancing, their bodies are communicating with each other. Then you get Tim Ingold, saying—"no, no, it's not a mental thing, it's not about vision, there's an embodied sense of where other bodies are." So they are giving you a metaphysical story about how, walking down the street, we order our bodies in relation to other bodies. That story is about normativity. Walking down the street, when I see somebody whom I might bump into, I'll open my body, I'll slow my gait to let them pass. Bodies make demands and claims on other bodies. (Al-Mohammad 2015)[21]

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21. The informal style of Al-Mohammad's prose reflects the occasion when these comments were offered in a debate. See Goffman (1967) and Ingold (2000).

Al-Mohammad is pointing to a critical idea—viz., that something about our embodiment takes into account the concrete other to whom we respond without the necessity of positing a contractual framework of agreement. Cora Diamond (1988) takes us deeper by showing that situations in which a normal order has been suspended, recognizing another as human becomes the pivotal point at which one might fall on the side of death or of life. Thus our concept of the human being is not simply a question of logical classifications but of our understanding of what a "human" life is. As she says, "It seems to be the view of many analytic philosophers that the concept of a human being is the concept of a member of a particular biological species, *Homo sapiens*. And, indeed, contemporary philosophy offers a sorry range of alternatives. It will allow that if 'human being' is a term for membership in a particular species, we may construe it as combining description of a thing as a member of that species with some evaluation or prescription concerning the thing: 'Protect its life' and so on" (Diamond 1988: 263). Thus, she recalls that whenever she suggested to other fellow philosophers that the notion of the "human being" was of the greatest significance in moral thought, her suggestion was taken to imply that what she had in mind was something like a decent or admirable human being (member of a species plus something added to it).. However, what Diamond was aiming at, was to ask what does it mean to know someone as "human" in the way Wittgenstein asked what knowing that something is a chair is—viz., everyday experiences of sitting on a chair, knowing if it is alright to put your feet up, or to sit before being asked to, etc. Diamond then puts forward the simple but profound idea that it is part of the concept of a human being that an immense amount of what being human is, for us humans, can be present in a look that passes between two people; it is also part of the concept of the human that one's humanity can equally be denied in a look. As ethnographers we are not always able to discern the significance of such moments when one's humanity is negated in a second-person way, except in exceptional circumstances—e.g., in the gaze of the Nazi official who is sorting out which of the prisoners were ready to be sent to the gas chamber. But everyday life throws such challenges at us: for instance, I am repeatedly confronted by the realization that I do not know how to look at a beggar in the streets of Delhi as he is aggressively displaying his stump of an arm eaten up by leprosy and asking for money, whether I end up giving money or not. Something in his glance—that this is what a human could become—shames me in ways that I cannot describe. Diamond (1988) gives more weighty

examples from literature to show us, remind us, "this is what it is like to fail to accord such recognition, to refuse it."

Take the great scene in *War and peace* in which Pierre's life is saved. I cite Diamond's discussion of the whole scene showing what can happen in a first-person/second-person scene that is so different from the language of moral claims and rights and demands.

> He [Pierre] is brought as prisoner before General Davouit, who, when he first looks up from the papers on his writing table, sees Pierre, who is standing before him, only as the present prisoner, the present circumstance to be dealt with; but something in Pierre's voice makes him look at him intently. At that moment, "an immense number of things passed dimly through both their minds." Tolstoy says nothing of what things; but they may be such things as scenes of childhood, of courtship, of the death of a parent or sibling, or (in Davouit's case) of a fellow soldier; they may be hopes and dreams, perhaps in Davouit's case those inspired, many years earlier, by the Revolution. In that second look, human relations between the two men are established; and it is that look which saves Pierre's life. (Diamond 1988: 264)

Pairing this scene with one in Primo Levi (1958) in which too it is the exchange of glances in which the human is recognized or denied, Diamond says that what these writers show us is that there can be a depth of denial or of recognition telling us something about human life that has nothing to do with our choosing to evaluate things one way or another. "I cannot choose what weight it shall have that I fail you, or betray you, or that I on some occasion look at you but with a look that leaves you a mere circumstance and not a human being. Levi and Tolstoy show us, then, the shape of certain possibilities in human life" (Diamond 1988: 265). She concludes that to have the concept of a human being is to know how thoughts and deeds and happenings are met, and how they give shape to a human story; it is a knowledge of possibilities, their weight and their mysteriousness. Such a concept of the human radically differs from the concept of the human being as a member of the biological species *Homo sapiens*. What it is to grasp the biological concept is framed by different circumstances and needs than what it is to grasp the idea of the human in this interaction between two persons—but going further, the second-person standpoint here is not so much a *standpoint* as it is an *absorption* in the mutuality of life that we might create for each other.

I appreciate Darwall's sustained demonstration that to understand how moral rules are followed cannot be done by simply positing a third person that gives objective standards and rules and a first person who follows the rules as she makes herself the subject of these moral demands. Rather, we need to add a second person in the interactive scene. But going further, I hope Diamond's excellent demonstration about how an exchange of glances between two people, the possibility that one might either recognize or deny the other's humanity, brings to light the background conditions, a sense of what is natural to the human (by that she does not mean human as the given) helps us to take moral theory in different directions than that of demands and claims that arise within a contractual frame. Unlike the Kantian conception of an innate desire to obey the moral law because that would make the state of affairs to be better, we have here a picture of the ethical as embedded within these moments of recognition that contain within them also the lethal possibility of the denial of each other.

The noncontractual as the frame for relations

Perhaps it is possible to rethink the aspect of noncontractual basis of our moral and ethical lives in the following way. Knud Løgstrup (1997) makes the case for such noncontractual morality in everyday life by insisting that "trust is essential to every conversation." Developing this idea further, David Cockburn (2014) argues that speech is essentially a form of contact (not contract) between human beings. Simple as this idea is, it draws from an essential register in Wittgenstein's thought that "trust" that makes conversation possible is less a question of epistemological certainty and more a question of inhabiting a life together. A fundamental feature of testimony, Cockburn argues, is not that I come to believe in the truth of what another tells me because I take it to be *evidence* that things are as they are said to be but because in the process of offering and receiving testimony a *relation* is established between the speaker and the hearer. In Cockburn's words: "There is a crucial contrast between *believing* what someone tells me and *learning* from the observation from her expressive behavior" (Cockburn 2014: emphasis added).

Distinguishing between epistemological stakes and ethical stakes in the idea that trust is necessary in a speech event between any two people, Cockburn establishes that the issues that arise in the context of testimony also arise in the context of ordinary speech. He gives an example to make this point. If, for instance, my friend mentions a person suddenly (say, Mary) and says she will be

here later while we are in the middle of a conversation on the weird behavior of another person (call him Barry) who has just given a speech, I might be puzzled for a moment but then realize it is Mary Smith to whom she is referring, who is a friend of the speaker and might therefore know more about the situation. The meaning of my friend's statement has dawned on me because I trust my friend's words and so I strive to find how they could be meaningful. Cockburn's thought connects to the technical requirements of conversation such as turn-taking but it also points to the difference between a view of language that assumes an "external" relation between language and the world (first a mental representation and then a communicative event to make it intersubjectively evident) and an internal relation in which we constantly read each other's expressions together as beings who have a life *in l*anguage.[22] It is this trust that helps us put the best construction on words that seem opaque or out of place. In Cavell's writings we see the tragic consequences when this trust gives way to skepticism and reason turns against itself, as was the case of Othello demanding more and better evidence of Desdemona's fidelity or Lear demanding to be shown that Cordelia truly loves him (Cavell 1987). Not trusting the words of the other is in effect a lack of trust in the other and in our mutual capacity to have a future together. In the examples Cavell gives from Shakespeare, we see that small slights, hurts, insults in everyday conversations might transform into a psychic annihilation of the other.

The first-person and its opacity

One of the most compelling accounts I have read on suffering and responsiveness is an ethnography of African American families living with their terminally ill children, facing their deaths, and taking on responsibilities for their care in the face of formidable obstacles (see Mattingly 2014). Cheryl Mattingly characterizes the theoretical frame of her book as that of a first-person virtue ethics but she is careful to explain that her experiences with these families have also led her to modify Aristotle's theory of virtue. She explains, "Moral striving matters a great deal to people in all sorts of societies. What constitutes the good

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22. Cockburn calls the first a Lockean view of language and the second a Wittgensteinian view. In the first case, the trust in the other results from an epistemological leap and implies a rather constricted view of the other while in the later case, it flows more from a grasp of the general framework of human life within which particular ways of speaking and thinking gather their sense.

life may vary widely from society to society, but it is difficult to imagine any community where this does not matter or where it has ceased to be important. . . . In fact, what may emerge from a focus on moral striving is not that people manage to live happy and flourishing lives but they are plagued by the threat of moral tragedy" (Mattingly 2014: 8).

Mattingly explains further that by a first-person virtue ethics she means that the aspirations of the families for a good life are not something that these care takers know in a "third-person sort of way," as moral truths that are out in the world, but that these are commitments and perspectives they have come to give themselves (cf. Mahmood 2004). She describes how a woman or a family will keep alive a hope for a child against all odds and how the singularity of a child's life appears in these narratives. The descriptions are contrasted with a third person perspective, such as that of a health worker who might have a different take on the situation of a terminally ill child on the basis of clinical prognosis. Between the objective knowledge of the health care worker and her mode of speaking and the way families strive to give expression to the value of this life for them, Mattingly finds that ethics is not only a matter of obligations that the families inherit but also of experiments that they conduct in the face of tremendous uncertainty and sorrow—an image evoked by the term "moral laboratories" in the title.

I have great sympathy with the attempt to define the project of caring through the lens of moral striving. My difficulty is that I do not see how a virtue ethics can be maintained without positing the narrative unity of life—a point MacIntyre (1984) insisted on in his critique of modernity. Indeed, one gets a sense that the families Mattingly describes with such tact are framing their stories in terms of a before and an after, giving it a narrative coherence. Yet I suggest that there are two "background conditions" that inform Mattingly's theorization of what she frames as "virtue ethics" and that cannot be character- ized in a straightforward way as constituting a first-person perspective. First, the stories she chooses to elaborate on are those in which a redemptive story seems to be providing a dominant frame. Thus parents who recreate themselves from a state of moral depravity (addiction, aimless violence, indifference) to a state of moral plenitude are given a voice in the text because they are understand- ingly the ones she admires and whom she befriended. There are others within the family who are not "up to the task" (as Mattingly puts it) and for whom she seems to have less sympathy. I wonder how making their stories appear in the text in whatever manner might have complicated the picture. Second, the plot

lines as Mattingly convincingly shows seem to resonate with Christian narratives of the conversion of the sinner, as does the figure of Jesus as the redeemer. How do these individual stories then get molded through the available genres? Put differently, how are third-person perspectives absorbed in the first person perspectives? What is the struggle of identifying what is my voice among the various voices that might live within me? My point is not that a first person perspective would have expunged all voices that come from the outside but that we need, perhaps, to dwell more explicitly on how I find myself in the dominant stories of my culture; equally important is the question of how do some voices retain the signs of their otherness? At one point in her discussion, Mattingly states that in the funeral orations on the occasion of the violent death of a young man, a gang member and friend of the dead youth says repeatedly, "The world is a cold, cruel place." Mattingly goes on to say, "Even the praise hymns sounded anguished. Yet, the response of families like Leroy's does not reflect the resigned despair that E. Valentine Daniel (1996) documents among the Sri Lankans, or that Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) observes among destitute Brazilian mothers who have come to accept the inevitable deaths of children 'without weeping'" (Mattingly 2014: 192). Perhaps Mattingly might have leant more of her ear to such resigned despair among family members who were "not up to the task"?

It seems to me that what is distinctive in the stories of parents who found the resources within the Christian tradition to let themselves experience the tragedies that were unfolding was the presence of the second person, the child toward whom the stories are oriented, a fact that Mattingly never loses sight of ethnographically but passes over in her theoretical discussion since the first-person and third-person perspectives are brought into conversation but not the mediation of the second person in her theoretical structure.[23]

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23. It is not that Mattingly does not touch on these complexities. Thus, in a crucial passage, she writes, "This is not to suggest that that our experiences are in any simple sense clearly available to us or give us an unquestioned understanding of what presents itself. . . . What's more, Lear comments, we have what he calls an 'ethical fantasy life, an inchoate sense that there is a remainder to life, something that is not captured in life as it is so far experienced.' . . . This experiential givenness, in all its shadowy complexity, can be contrasted with a "third person perspective" that begins with the categories themselves" (Mattingly 2014: 13). Brilliant as this formulation is, it does not face up to the issue that the contrast between a shadowy experiential complexity of the first person and the categorical clarity of the third person is not enough, for missing in this account is the second person.

It might be helpful here to consider the classic paper by Elizabeth Anscombe on the first person and its opacity. While we are used to thinking of the triadic structure of personal pronouns as if the three terms were symmetrical and indeed, while "I" functions syntactically like a proper name, Anscombe (1981) contends that it is not easy to know what "I" stands for (the argument is deeper than the idea that I is a shifter)—i.e., depending on context it can stand for Veena, or Michael, or Webb, or Didier. Anscombe offers a thought experiment, which I will not repeat here but I hope some readers will be tempted to pursue it further. The import of the thought experiment, as I understand it, is that I know myself in a third-person kind of way—i.e., I know that I have this name, I can give you the name of my school, or many other facts of this kind. However, if it comes to reporting if I am in pain, or how I feel about the beggar in the street to which I referred earlier, or to the testimony I give about myself, I do not observe myself and then infer that this is how I feel. If I characterize these activities as self-reporting then what kind of self is the self on which I am reporting? It is after all not one object among others—for instance, I cannot envisage the possibility of laying aside my self somewhere and then searching here and there to find it. So what does it mean that in staging the doubts on how do I know that I exist (Descartes used the first person)—i.e., not how do I know that the world exists but how do I know I exist? Famously, Descartes did not find the proof of his existence in the fact that he has a body but in something like a mind or a soul. I must postpone for another occasion a detailed discussion of how such perplexities about the existence of the self are dramatized in Buddhist and Hindu texts, but I do wish to point out that these matters are not simply matters of cultural differences. Just as Locke asked if the I remains the same at the inception of an act (I am doing it) and when the act was done, these texts are full of examples about the continuity and instability of the self, the place of the you in defining me, not just a someone who has these publicly recognizable characteristics but as challenging me to get a deeper sense of who I am. As Anscombe puts it, "Thus we find that if I is a referring expression, then Descartes was right in what the referent was. His position has, however, the intolerable difficulty of requiring an identification of the same referent in different 'I' thoughts. (This led Russell to speak of 'short term selves')" (Anscombe 1981: 31).

Of course short-term selves would not be acceptable as a defense in a court of law, but even in a court of law there is some recognition that the expressions and actions that come out of me might not be strictly mine on certain occasions, as in passion crimes or in the case of serious mental illness when we are

sometimes moved to say it is not the person who is speaking but the disease which is speaking. The same thought might be applied in ritual contexts when I might be dispossessed of myself by a spirit (Lambek 1981) or I might give myself on lease to another (the hotri priest in the vedic sacrifice) for the duration of the ritual (Das 1983; Malamoud 1996). In the famous dice scene in the Mahabharata that Hiltebeitel (2001) has examined in detail, when the protagonist, Yudhishtihira, stakes his wife (the princess Druapadi) in a final desperate bid and loses her, she is dragged to the court in a disheveled condition.[24] The question she has for the assembly is, had the king staked himself before he staked me?—in other words, was he in possession of himself? I have elsewhere examined how her question silences the most profound proponents of the *dharma* (dharma becomes mute, as I put it) and thus her question looms over the entire text, making the text itself into an argument with the gods (Das 2013).

Would it make a difference to the narration of individual lives that the pressure of the cosmological or mythical in a world that inherits these kinds of sensitivities focuses on the impossibility of dharma, rather than on redemption narratives through the grace of a Jesus-like figure or through aligning oneself through a leap of faith to a figure like Saint Paul (Robbins 2010)? I do not wish to suggest that there is only one possibility of self-formation in any particular cultural milieu—stories about saints, gurus, and divine grace abound in the Hindu texts and in lives—but perhaps we need to develop and sharpen these differences as heuristic exercises (if nothing else) in order to see how something like a triadic structure of personal pronouns that seems like a morally neutral grammatical form might be embedded in a cosmology that in turn gives a different moral coloring to our ideas of what is the self in relation to the world.

I offer one example of this thought experiment though I cannot elaborate it in any kind of detail here. Based on his studies of Indo-European, Émile Benveniste (1971) famously argued that that the first and second person stand

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24. The story of the epic is well known. It centers on the events that lead to a fraternal war of total destruction between two princely lineages, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The episode of the dice game is that of Yudhisthira, the eldest brother of the five Pandavas, who is lured into a game of dice with his opponent, Duryodhan, the eldest brother of the Kaurava lineage. After losing all his possessions in the rigged game, Yudhishthira stakes Druapadi, the wife shared by the five brothers, and loses her in the dice game. Dragged to court where she is assumed to be now the common possession of the Kauravas, Draupadi has one of the most profound discussions on *dharma,* or righteousness, that I discuss here.

respectively for the speaker of the discourse and his or her addressee. The dialogical context was central for Benveniste for an understanding of the grammatical person—thus he was able to argue that the so-called third person, one who was spoken about was in certain respects a nonperson since he or she was not indexed as a participant in the dialogical scene.

The terms first person, second person, and third person, seem to indicate relative distance from the speaker or enunciator of discourse, so it is intriguing to see that in Sanskrit the terms are *uttam purusha* (the supreme or best of persons), *madhyam purusha* (the intermediary, or one who is in-between), and *pratham purusha* (pratham literally means the "first" but it is intriguing that first here is used to designate what is the third in English grammar)—these designate respectively, the agent of speech, the listener, and the one spoken about who has the quality of both being third and being "first" because he or she can be brought into sentience through being addressed. Are these terms arbitrary designations or do they express a structure of aspirations?

Bettina Bäumer (2008) explains that in the canonical text Paratrisika, that Abhinavagupta comments on, the aspiration is to overcome the trichotomy of the three persons. The exegetical context is the explanation of the address of Bhairava (Shiva) to the Devi (the goddess) in the expression *shrnu devi,* "listen devi." For my purpose the most interesting aspect of the discussion is on the reliance on the vocative (Shiva addresses Devi as thou)—the second person (or the medium). An important point I want to flag is that even in the dominant scheme of Panian grammar in which the dialogical context of the grammatical persons is not evident, the pratham purusha (the English third person) has the nature of a remainder—that which is left to be supplied after the supreme person (I) and the intermediary or middle person (you) have been given their grammatical specifications. Since the pratham purusha (English third person) is *nara* or man[25]—who is also insentient within this cosmology unless addressed—we get two conceptions of the English first person: the concrete I that is enmeshed in ego (*ahamkara*) and hence is like the insentient object (the third) and the "I"

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25. To clarify this point further, the grammatical persons are mapped onto the cosmological context when the grammatical rule is explained through the triadic character of tantra as Shiva (the one who is the speaker); Shakti, the goddess who is addressed; and nara (man) who has an insentient quality and hence occupies the place of the "third person"—thing-like—until he, too, can hear what is being said. Grammar could not, in this system of thought, be separated from cosmology. I leave this as a pointer for future work on the grammatical person.

that becomes the enunciator of discourse when incorporated in the fluid transactions of the personal pronouns as they intersect and flow into each other.[26]

Consider this passage: "That which appears even as 'this,' when addressed, becomes completely enveloped with the I-feeling of the addressor. The 'this' which is different from the addressor, when addressed as 'you' becomes shakti" (cited in Bäumer 2008). Other examples of the fluidity of the three persons are Kalidasa's addressing of the mountains in Meghaduta, "listen, oh mountains" that when thus addressed become a "you." Conversely the "you" when addressed in the reverential form—*bhavan gauravah*—the honored one, becomes the third person. Finally in creating the plural of the uttam purush (English first person) in cooperative activity in which you and I are engaged—the you is assimilated in the uttam pursuha as "we." "You and I are cooking" becomes "we are cooking"—showing the preeminence of the "I." This signals the thorny issue of the conditions under which "we" is allowed to subsume the "you"—a point I will briefly return to in the final concluding section.

The final point I want to make about the fluidity of the three persons in the process of exchange is that the discussion of grammar connects with the discussion on aesthetic theory where the puzzle was to think how it is that poetry can move me (as listener or reader) to experience the emotions portrayed in a literary text as if they were my emotions. Similarly, in the texts on ritual the puzzle

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26. Panini assigns the first and second person (designations according to English usage) on the basis of their cooccurrence with the pronouns *asmad* and *yushmad*, the abstract forms respectively of I and you, regardless of whether they are mentioned or omitted in the utterance. The third person is assigned by default to the remaining cases—*sheshe prathamah*. Ishwar Kaul, the great Kashmiri grammarian who was the first scholar to provide a systematic treatise of the grammar of a vernacular language, used a dominant Panian framework, but made brilliant innovations to render the specificity of Kashmiri not in terms of deviations but as a set of rules diagonal to the Panian rules (see Del Bon and Vergiani 2008). In the case of the triadic structure of grammatical persons, he was probably influenced by Abhinavagupta for in his definition—the first (pratham), middle (madhyam), and the last (uttam) are determined by one who is not the person addressed, the person addressed, and the speaker, *asrotr, srotr, vaktr bhedat* (lit. due to the difference between nonhearer, hearer, and speaker). The tantric frame of the dialogue between Shiva (the speaker) and Shakti (the goddess who is addressed) is implicit.

I realize that taking the Sanskrit terminology for the grammatical persons appears confusing to the English reader but I do want to press on the point that there is a physiognomy to the words—so we feel disconcerted that the first person is actually the third person in English—but this might be an interesting experience for the reader.

was that one could interpret a third person way of expressing an injunction as applying to oneself. Thus the person of the sacrificer in the mimamsa texts is indicated by the optative mood—*svargakamah yajet*—let one who is desirous of heaven perform sacrifice. How does the one who is performing sacrifice recognize his desire in this general injunction?

My purpose here is not to give a detailed analysis of these texts on which there is already a formidable scholarship (Bäumer 2008; Lawrence 2008; Haag-Bernede 2001) but to show that for all our exhortations in anthropology to be open to alternate traditions of thought, we anthropologists have simply not cultivated the apparatus to engage these alternate conceptions that might give thought a different direction. An important question that might arise at this point might be to ask if such discussions are now consigned to textual traditions without much relevance to people's lives or if they were ever relevant to anyone except the scholars? I could give considerable evidence from literature that such a theoretical apparatus could illuminate important moments in various texts but I will give just one example of the flow between the first person, second person, and the third person (English terms) from my fieldwork.

One of the minor local leaders in the low-income neighborhood that I have studied is a Muslim living in a primarily Hindu neighborhood who is considered adept in dealing with the police and mediating with other officials in settling petty crimes or infringements of law. Explaining how he came to enjoy this position of influence, he said, "I am their mama (MB) Shakuni." Shakuni is an interesting character in the epic Mahabharata. The mother's brother of the Duryodhana, who refuses to yield the rightful share of the kingdom to his cousins, the Pandavas—a refusal that ultimately leads to the war of Kurukshetra and the annihilation of the warrior lineages. Now it is clear from the text that Duryodhana was constantly instigated to enlarge the theater of war by Shakuni, but it is not clear if this was because Shakuni loved Duryodhana and his brothers and hence wanted him to be the supreme king or if he hated the lineage of the Kauravas from which Duryodhana hailed because Duryodhana's father, King Dhritrashtra, had imprisoned all of Shakuni's brothers in the past because of a misunderstanding, where they all died of starvation. Shakuni survived because they gave their meager rations to him to eat so that he, the cleverest of all of them, could survive and avenge the injustice done to them.

In the utterance, "I am their mama Shakuni," the Muslim leader is the enunciator, the first person but we can see the presence of the second person in the same way that the honorific address to the second person was expressed through

the third person (*their* Shakuni mama) while Shakuni is the distant figure of the myth—the third person in whom the local leader recognizes himself from the angle of vision of his neighbors. This complex sentence—a self-disclosure—also shows how the leader left me to comprehend as best as I could whether he loved his neighbors or hated them and wanted their annihilation! I do not say that such modes of speaking could not be analyzed by the application of more familiar (in anthropology) forms of semiotic analyses but unless we begin to actively deploy other frameworks of thought we will not know in advance what forms of resonances and differences we might detect.

A second example in which the vocative plays a crucial role is the imaginary dialogue that my respondents often performed when explaining a particular situation. Elsewhere I have given a detailed exposition of Sanjeev Gupta's (a local leader) imaginary dialogue with an elected representative when he was explaining to me why they did not invite any elected representative on the occasion of the inauguration of the new transformers in their locality (Das 2014a). His point was that electricity was legally sanctioned for their area, which was an "unauthorized colony" in legal parlance and hence fell in the gray zone where the law was not clear about their entitlements to basic services but the elected representative had not offered any help to expedite the process. Gupta said, "*aji sahib aap hote kaun hain*—oh sahib, who are you?" with a string of further admonishments, as if the elected representative was present right before him. Similar use of the vocative in relation to oneself is a very important literary device to express self-criticism (see an example of Rama addressing his own right arm with the contemptuous "*re re*" as he prepares to kill the learned Shudra sage who was to be punished for daring to study the Vedas from the dramatist Bhavabhuti's *Uttarramacharita* (see Das 2013). Gupta is no grammarian but I found that my attentiveness to these forms of speech was guided by my familiarity with the discussions in such texts as that of aesthetic or ritual theory. Such attention was in turn vital for me to disclose the work done in everyday life within which people could sometimes receive the place their culture had made for them as a gift and sometimes as a rebuke (cf. Favret-Saada 2015).

THE IMAGE OF THE WORLD AND THE MORAL SUBJECT

We return in this section to the relation between the picture of the world and the moral subject—recall the earlier discussion from Diamond (1988) and

MacIntyre (1984) on the harmony between our moral concepts and our worlds. In relation to Henrich's (1992) discussion of the moral image underlying Kant's notion that there is innate desire to obey the law, I had raised the question as to what happens if our sense of the world as a whole is that it is not a benign world. How would our concepts reflect such a state of affairs? I discuss two issues in this section: the first is the imagination in the Hindu conception of life that it is embedded in violence sometimes seen as the very condition of living and sometimes as the character of the times in which humans come into history; the second issue is with regard to particular forms of life such as the life of Empire in which one cannot escape complicity with unjust projects even if one has tried to live a moral life according to one's own light.

Speaking of Jainism as a way of life, James Laidlaw (2014) in his compelling analysis of ethics through Foucault's notions of practices of freedom, describes the dilemmas of lay Jains as follows:

> It would be easily possible to portray a coherent project for the formation of a self-consistent virtual self (within Jainism). Such a project is readily articulated in various levels of detail by Jain intellectuals (as no doubt it is by reformist Islamic leaders) and indeed by comparatively unlettered laypersons. What these Jains describe is elegant and in many ways compelling; a project for the attainment of spiritual perfection and enlightenment through the rigorous ascetic elimination of all desire, passion, and attachment; but it is literally unlivable. (Laidlaw 2014: 168)

Laidlaw also speaks about the sense of impossibility expressed by his Jain informants as regards the ability to live a Jain life.

> I noticed early on in fieldwork that one point many lay Jains were keen to make clear to me was that "Jainism is impossible." By this they did not mean either that it is unclear what its teachings are or that it is literally impossible to follow them. . . . What people meant by "Jainism is impossible" is that for them, still committed as they are to their this-worldly life rather than to a soteriological path out of it, none of this tells them how to be a good Jain. . . . A good, lay Jain . . . should venerate, protect, and materially support those renouncers who follow the soteriological path; but this, because it requires good public standing, political and material resources . . . conflicts *directly* with the central precepts of virtuous ascetic life itself. The more you are a good lay Jain, the less you can be a true *Jain*. (Laidlaw 2014: 126, emphasis in original)

Now, Laidlaw interprets these expressions as indicative of the impossibility of living out a consistent moral vision and argues that a form of life such as Jainism provides a set of conflicting values and those who have chosen to live a lay life must endure the contradictions it entails. Let me recount that in the Hindu conception of life (bracketing for the moment dialogues internal to the tradition) the expression "Jainism is impossible" would have been an indication of a certain kind of disappointment with human life. Let me illustrate.

In my earlier work, I examined the debates between Jains and Brahmins in a thirteenth-century text from Gujarat, where the Brahmins contested the criticism against sacrifice by arguing that "life feeds upon life" and who can exist without causing some injury to the other—whether human, animal, plant, or the earth itself (see Das 1976, 2012)? This is a melancholic view of what it is to have human existence—and the idea of conflict of values or the choice between different values just does not capture this sense of melancholy that one has offended the world just by existing (cf. Diamond 2008)—yet the cure for this melancholy, the Brahmins seem to assert on behalf of the householder, is not escape but an embrace of this difficulty of reality. The difference between our (Laidlaw and mine) reading of "Jainism is impossible" hinges more on the tone, pitch, and physiognomy of words and what they imply about being awakened to one's existence—making a choice between one set of values versus another simply fails for me to capture that sense of melancholy that surfaces off and on in Laidlaw's ethnography.

Perhaps I can return once more to the Mahabharata and the category of noncruelty that emerges in the text. When the protagonist of the main story, Yudhisthira, is asked what is the highest *dharma* (conduct), he responds that noncruelty is the highest *dharma.* Elsewhere I have argued (Das 2013) that through this and other stories, the text seems to suggest that when principles like *dharma* (righteous conduct) are elevated to become absolute, they themselves become productive of the annihilating violence that the text documents. Thus noncruelty rather than nonviolence is offered as the highest dharma as a scale more appropriate to the human. What the text offers is not a choice between nonviolence and noncruelty as two distinct values but a mode of being that can make it possible for humans to dwell not only with each other but with the animal, plant, and mineral world. In everyday life, the text seems to suggest, we are fenced off from certain experiences—we cannot know with certainty, for example, if we are truly loved, or what past karmas attach to us. Falling into the tempo of skepticism we are capable of unleashing unprecedented violence: through the device

of side shadowing (instead of foreshadowing) the text suggests that our present actions might leave reservoirs of dangerous potentiality that will play out in the future. Thus, in every story the character is imagined as having a different possible self that lives out the consequences of actions that might have originated in a different imagination of the person. Draupadi, for instance, is the daughter of the mighty king Drupad, but her other names (Yagyaseni and Krishna) refer to her dark origins as a residue of a sacrifice that the king (Drupad) had performed for the birth of a mighty son who would defeat his enemies. These dark origins are what work out as she becomes the cause of the great war and an extinction of the kingly lineages whose constant wars have made the earth tired. The melancholy that marks this story comes from the realization that actions leave a trail of consequences so that even the most virtuous person might set off a destruction because we are not the masters of our own actions.

Laidlaw's repeated references to the fact that ethical systems are not in the nature of coherent wholes is very well taken and demonstrated with the help of great ethnographic examples. He emphasizes that cosmologies might appear as coherent and well integrated when they are narrated but not as they are lived. There are various established norms, Laidlaw tells us, that "represent resources that may be drawn on in the continuous and unending conflict between these values, and the way people do this not only vary according to their dispositions and circumstances but they also typically change quite markedly in the course of their lives" (2014: 127). This description does a lot to dislodge the rather naïve morality that assumes an overdrawn contrast between unreflective habit and the interruptions brought be moments of moral breakdown—an implicit assumption about everyday life that I have repeatedly put into question. Yet the language of different norms as "resources" and the person as balancing different norms as he or she makes choices is still tied to a model of rational action that suggests existential discomfort with what is possible but does not quite bring out the full promise of what such lives might entail by way of encountering luck, chance, and other contingencies that shape their lives. What does the propensity to accident tell us about the shape of our moral lives? Laidlaw considers these questions with reference to the limits of the self and the limits of responsibility in the juridical sense but not as parts of a lived reality within this kind of picture of the world. Ahead I offer an example of what this implies for constituting the ethical or moral subject. Laidlaw rightly argues that when notions of rebirth, circulation of souls between animal and humans, and *karma* are taken seriously, or when the dead are incorporated within the domain of kinship, the ethical

subject must extend beyond the lifetime of an individual. He asks, what kind of technologies of ethical self-fashioning might be available for the imagination of the shape of one's life under these conditions? I have doubts that Foucault, on whom Laidlaw relies for thinking of ethics, is generally a good guide on these questions—I hope the reasons will become clear through the example of Manju, and a moral impulse of what demands proximity puts on us.

Manju's eldest son was having an affair with a girl in the neighborhood who was from a different caste. He was also more of a vagabond and a footloose character who could never hold a job for long. In contrast, his younger brother was very sober and stable and contributed consistently to family income. The parents were completely opposed to the prospects of a "love marriage" for the elder son but the boy used all kinds of threats including that of suicide, so they bent to his will. Unfortunately within two days of the marriage the girl ran away with another man with whom she was also having an affair, taking away with her the jewelry that had been given in dowry and also stealing the jewelry that Manju had given her to wear during the wedding. I will not go into the details of the negotiations with the girl's family, the police reports they had to file, the suicidal depression in which the son fell but instead, fast forward to an event one and a half years later. It transpired that the man she had run away with sold all the jewelry. They ran out of cash at the end of the first year having travelled to various places and lived lavishly in fancy hotels. The girl became pregnant and at that point her lover abandoned her. Neither his parents nor her parents were willing to give her refuge. Her parents did support her until the birth of the child but then threw her out of the house. Manju said one evening she found that the girl had come back and was sitting on the doorstep with her infant daughter in her arms. Manju was furious but after a few hours of bearing this disturbing scenario, she invited mother and daughter to come in. As she explained, she could not bear the idea that the woman might have to turn to prostitution and that the infant girl's future would be marked by sexual abuse or prostitution. Since the family had kept the details of the elopement secret from the wider kin though there must have been rumors, Manju created a place for her in the family. Manju's son too said he was reconciled to the fact that in his past birth he had "owed" her and her daughter something—a debt or a restitution for his own bad behavior toward her in an earlier birth—so their conjugal relation was reestablished. From a wayward daughter-in-law the girl became a dutiful wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Manju said with some ferocity that if her daughter-in-law had given birth to a boy she would not have taken her back for "she should have been punished for what she did."

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These are the bare bones of the story, but they will suffice for the moment. It seems clear to me that a retrospective rendering of this story might be able to cast it in terms of Manju making a "decision" to accept her daughter-in-law despite her transgressions, but what she emphasized in her account was the existential pressure she felt at the sight of her daughter-in-law sitting on the doorstep with an infant in her arms, without food, without water, and unable to protect her daughter from a bleak future. If the ethical subject here is the set of relations rather than a individual who is the locus of decision, then a moral life is crafted as much out of the affective force of an attunement to this other who is not wholly other, who could be me, and to whom I may owe a debt from my past life whose nature is unknown in the here and the now. I submit that the usual paths that moral theory takes with its "ought" and its "should" simply do not suffice. The paths to a moral life do not lie here in either rule following or in taking recourse to technologies of self making but rather in the attentiveness through which one ties one's own fate to that of the other.

I did not expect to find an example of noncruelty in the slums in Delhi but just as in the Mahabharata, noncruelty is demonstrated in the story of a parrot who does not abandon a scorched tree though other trees with fruits and flowers are there; or Yudhishthira, who does not abandon the stray dog who attaches himself to him[27] in his last journey to heaven; so Manju could not turn away from the woman and the child who attach themselves to her. The point is that Manju knew that accepting the love child of another man that her daughter-in-law had borne would put pressure on the entire family but a moral response for her was the ability to bear this knowledge and to remain faithful to the contingency of caring for a child whom fate had attached to her. It is clear in the stories of the Mahabharata that no one would have blamed the parrot for abandoning the tree or blamed Yudhishthira for abandoning the dog but each remained faithful to what fate had joined them to. I am inclined to say

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27.   The story of the parrot is that the tree in which he had lived was scorched by the arrow of a hunter and withered away but while others left the scorched tree to make their home in other trees with fruits and flowers, the parrot stuck to it saying that he could not leave the tree where he had spent his life. The other story is of a stray dog that attaches itself to Yudhisthira on his final journey to heaven. When urged to leave the dog so that he could ascend to heaven in his bodily form Yudhithira prefers to forego heaven rather than abandon the dog. Both stories are offered as examples of noncruelty and show a morality premised not on contract but on being faithful to what has been contingently joined to one.

that what Manju demonstrated was the quality of noncruelty as described in the Mahabharata but to put the weight of the ethical in terms of choices made between different norms seems alien to the feel of the event. Why some women like Manju are able to accept such events as what they were fated to bear while others cannot do so is a very difficult issue to resolve.

Laidlaw (2014) responds to my criticisms or friendly amendments by saying that for his Jain respondents, what I describe are sensitivities formed within a Hindu view of life—so the householder's retort to the ascetic rings false within the Jain form of life. I appreciate this clarification and yet I wonder if such criticisms do not ever surface—i.e., come unbidden outside the narrative of the lay Jain being unable to pursue the ideal of an ascetic life privileged by Laidlaw. For instance, for all the respect shown to the ascetic mode, Tulasidas, the author of Ramchiritamanas, one of the many vernacular renderings of the epic Ramayana, cannot refrain from criticizing the ascetic through the worlds of Maina, the mother of Parvati, who is appalled at seeing that as a bridegroom, Shiva comes dressed like a wild ascetic for the wedding. Cursing Narad, the wandering renouncer who had arranged the marriage, she says famously, "*bajnjh ka jaane prasav ki peeda*—how would an infertile woman know the pain of childbirth?" Are such voices of interrogation from the householder's perspective completely absent from the Jain world?

Whatever our differences, I think Laidlaw and I would agree that in both Jainism and Hinduism what we find is a response to the intolerable realization that one cannot live without committing some violence on the world. One description of ethical life or the sense of the ethical as it applies to life as a whole might be to see what kind of responsiveness we show to these conditions of human life both in the project of self-formation and in the way we inhabit the world. In that sense the subject of ethics is not simply an individual but also a whole way of life (see also Diamond 2008).[28]

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28. This is the reason that one cannot simply pick up some discrete practice such as vegetarianism and take it as evidence that because Jains value vegetarianism, it orients diasporic Jains to embrace animal rights projects (Robbins 2015). We would have to inquire further if the conditions of human life to which vegetarianism is one response (accepting more diminutive concepts such as noncruelty being another), do the values that inform animal rights activism and thus that propel Jains into activism stem from the same picture of the moral word? Or are these two partners in activism responding to different pictures of the world?

Responding to the forms human life takes

In a recent essay Jonathan Lear (2015) emphasizes that if *we* are inhabitants of an unjust social order it is likely that our own possibilities for thought will be tainted by the very injustice we are trying to understand. Philosophical reflection on its own, he says, is limited here in two ways. First, there is the danger that reflection will itself be an illusion of "stepping back" to an impartial perspective (see also Lear 2006). Thus, the crippled nature of our thought will be enacted in reflection rather than addressed by it. Second, in conditions of injustice, he argues, we suffer deprivation in imagination: we fail to envisage possibilities for life and thought. This cannot, of course, be the whole story for it is precisely conditions of injustice that make Gandhi commit to a life in which political mobilization takes techniques of *satyagrah* (lit. insistence on truth though often translated as civil disobedience) as essential to life under colonialism. Yet, is there merit in asking how our thought might get compromised under such conditions of injustice?

Lear illustrates his argument by a detailed consideration of J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Waiting for the barbarians* (Coetzee [1980] 2004). Literary critic Matt DelConte (2007) argues that the four-wall present-tense structure in Coetzee's novel makes it possible to see the events not as rendered retrospectively but in terms of an unfolding self-awareness in which the course of events is not given in advance. For Lear the importance of the novel lies not in its literary qualities alone but in the force with which it implicates the reader in the moral questions it poses. Here is a brief recapitulation of the novel as given in DelConte (2007).

Waiting for the barbarians portrays the ethical awakening of a nameless magistrate, who, after witnessing the brutal torture of "barbarians" by the Empire he serves, begins to recognize his own complicity in the Empire's colonizing agenda. Suffering from anxieties of sexual and political impotence, the aging magistrate, also the novel's narrator, initiates a (mainly physical) relationship with a "barbarian" woman, a member of the tribe that the Empire seeks to vanquish and a victim of its torture. After eventually "releasing" the woman back to her people, the magistrate is imprisoned and tortured by the Empire who suspects him of colluding with the barbarians. Ultimately, the Empire's contingency is shown as most of the outpost's inhabitants flee in fear of a presumed barbarian attack. The novel ends with the magistrate reclaiming—principally by default—his post to a depleted barracks, still unsure of his own relationship to the barbarians and to (literal and figurative) colonization.

The shape of this ethical awakening that DelConte alludes to is the realization by the magistrate of his own complicity in the project of Empire even as he is horrified by the torture. DelConte's main interest is in showing how the four-cornered present tense allows the novel to acquire an open-ended character to engage readers in the visual economy of the difficulty of seeing what is before their eyes, even as the readers inhabit a different time than that of the characters. But he does not ask what the temporality of waiting, signaled in the title and also in the way Coetzee borrows the poet Cavafy's title, might be—and yet as in Cavafy's poem "Waiting for the barbarians," the whole issue is that the barbarians do not come but the waiting has already become a way of living. Is a way of living the same as a form of life?

Anthropologists Pradip Jegannathan (2004) and Ghassan Hage (2009) argue that what defines and sustains such a form of life in which there is no route to go forward or backward is waiting. If fearful anticipation is the main affect of this form of waiting (at checkpoints, in crowds, in cafes, in the school bus), if the barbarian or the terrorist is just one moment away, only it did not happen this time—but it will happen the next time so we better be watchful and suspicious of every object we see lying around that might after all contain a bomb, every string of words we overhear that sound foreign—the world as a whole becomes pregnant with unforeseen dangers. This is simply the other side of the vulnerability and fragility of our world as a whole. Lear makes an important theoretical leap in characterizing waiting itself as a form of life, or the life that Empire embodies.

The significant feature of waiting as a way of life, is that we come to imagine that the potential is always standing at the doorstep of reality, so polite conversation might cover up the fact that the time of not-happening is also the time of happening; a time when Empire is in the phase of preparation—waiting for the attacks to happen, oiling the factories in which weapons are being forged, intelligence operations that are scoping out the enemy territory—our complicity in these acts does not have to be demonstrated to anyone: it is there. Our ordinary talk, polite teatime conversations, and conventions not to discuss politics with guests over dinner—in all this the barbarian (terrorist) is everywhere and nowhere. Those who fall on the side of the barbaric must ask if there will be an end to this mode of warfare on behalf of Empire. As the magistrate can see, Lear argues, Empire is not a linear process: it is a circular one. In the end when the magistrate has himself been tortured for assumed complicity with the barbarians, he can only address one interlocutor:

"No, listen!" I say. "Do not misunderstand me, I am not blaming you or accusing you, I am long past that. Remember, I too have devoted a life to the law, I know its processes, I know that the workings of justice are often obscure. I am only trying to understand. I am trying to understand the zone in which you live." (cited in Lear 2015: 145)

If the notion of waiting as a form of life, made sense in relation to the structure of potentiality and the overriding affect of living in anticipation, then the magistrate at the point at which he reflects the structure of a life lived in accordance with the law, must come to see the opacity of the world he has participated in.

I did not mean to get embroiled in this. I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire. I collect the tithes and taxes, administer the communal lands, see that the garrison is provided for, supervise the junior officers who are the only officers we have here, keep an eye on trade, preside over the law-court twice a week. For the rest I watch the sun rise and set, eat and sleep and am content.

When I pass away I hope to merit three lines of small print in the Imperial gazette. I have not asked for more than a quiet life in quiet times. (Coetzee 2004: 7)

But a quiet life and a quiet passing away is precisely what will not be granted to the magistrate for there are no innocent witnesses in world in which Empire creates and then feeds on images of disaster. Is the population of the civilized world that contributes to its maintenance without directly participating in torture fenced off from the zone of life in which the torturer lives? What is the texture of this fencing off?

Said in a different way, I am left to wonder if simply characterizing waiting as a form of life is sufficient specification of its texture. If we understand the form that Empire takes, do we understand the life it creates? I am inclined to think that it is the way life slides into nonlife, or the human into the monstrous that is at stake here. A passage from Cavell (1979) seems to shine a light here.

We are more or less accustomed to think of this response (to classical tragedy) as made up of pity and terror, as if what we witness is the subjection of the human being to states of violence, to one's own and to others; for example, terror at the causes and consequences of human rage, jealousy, ambition, pride, self-ignorance.

. . . But suppose that there is a mode of tragedy in which what we witness is the subjection of the human being to states of violation, a perception that not merely human law but human nature itself can be abrogated. . . . The particular mysteriousness in Hamlet's motivation may be in persisting in looking through his events for an object of terror. We should try looking at him as a figure of horror to himself. (Cavell 1979: 419–20)

For the magistrate the problem is that the torturer is not a figure of horror to himself; the horror the torturer evokes does not lie in his taking a monstrous shape but in the human shape of things he can still engage in.

"I am trying to imagine how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me! If I were he, I say to myself, my hands would feel so dirty that it would choke me . . ." (Coetzee 2004: 123–24).

I stated earlier in this lecture that Diamond captures something profound in the idea about the human, as that which is revealed and concealed in a simple exchange of glances. But we might find this common sense precisely at the moment when it is expelled from a form of life—only of that which is the human can we speak of its inhumanity—the brilliance of Coetzee lies in locating that expulsion of the human common sense in the mystery that a torturer can behave like an ordinary human being. In such cases it might be more appropriate to speak not of a form of life but of a form of death that has been produced from the womb of the everyday within the structure of Empire.

I conclude this section with the reflection that what is at stake, then, in the moral is our sense of life as a whole. For many scholars the moral or the ethical is best understood at moments when there is a breakdown of our habitual modes of dwelling in the world (Zigon 2007, 2009) and there is no doubt that sometimes people narrate their lives in this manner. However, to privilege these moments as if it was self-evident that they reflect the ethical in some pure form is to overlook precisely the kinds of complexities that a more sustained reflection on everyday life such as the life of the magistrate reveals. Even if we were never to have participated in torture, or in inflicting direct violence on anyone, the Hindu sensibilities I described earlier, or the life of Empire in which we all presently live, would leave the haunting question of how we are made complicit in the violence that is part of our lives. How would one endure life rather than how one would resolve a moral dilemma in the gripping drama of the dark night of the soul becomes the pressing issue. In the final and concluding section I offer some reflections on the implications of using our imagination to bring

forth a picture of everyday life within which we might seek to find ways of being with others while accepting the moderate immorality in which everyday life implicates us.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

My aim in this lecture has not been to put forward an *argument* but to ask how living with the fragility, vulnerability, joys, and sorrows that everyday life entails might reveal the contours of our ethical lives. In the process I have engaged the work of anthropologists and philosophers in a spirit of learning from them but also detecting the manner in which even when words look similar to the ones used by scholars in the Wittgensteinian lineage—everyday life, fragility, agreement, choice, ordinary, ethical, moral, world, natural, social, life, conversation, habit (for instance)—these are anchored to very different pictures of the everyday. Within the constraints of writing I have had to organize my reflections as if there were a linear progression of ideas but in fact one might think of the different sections as different panels that are simultaneously present as the narrator moves backward and forward by shining her torch on one for a time and then moves to anther to come back to the first one again later, much as the storyteller does in relation to a panel of images in many genres of performance in India. Nevertheless, it may be helpful here to recapitulate the major concerns in a schematic fashion.

First, I have argued that moral concepts do not have sharp boundaries, which is why I do not begin with some axiomatic statement about the definition of ethics. Instead, I argue that concepts of ethical, unethical, moral, among others, force themselves upon us. This is surely because how we are within a form of life does not draw sharp boundaries between *us* and *them*—the anthropologist and ways and those on whom we write. One of my friends who is an amil (Muslim healer) remarked to me that this "anthropology" that I practice was like his "amiliyat" for both of us were destined to hear stories of human suffering (Das 2015a) This does not mean that cultural differences can be simply elided under an overarching notion of the human but that like our interlocutors we too can imagine ourselves as being "us" and as being "them"—i.e., an imagination of the fact that our lives could have been otherwise. This is a different imagination of the self in everyday life than that of the judge charged with separating wrong from right.

Second, I have argued that everyday life cannot be taken as simply given. Instead, the rendering of everyday life depends on what our imagination of the everyday is. If we imagine everyday life as the domestic, then threats to it will be seen in the vocabulary of kinship; if we see it as the place of banal repetition, then the threats might be seen as emanating from a hostile outside or a slow corrosion of the inside. In all such descriptions, notions of what is ethical are intimately tied with the ever-present threat of skepticism—of doubt that what is ethical brings into being what is unethical. This is not a matter of evaluative judgments from the perspective of one who stands outside the flux of life but of the difficulty of knowing or mastering our own experience. We certainly judge the rightness of expressions or the truthfulness of our responses but this is done from within a form of life and the meaning of even a moment can take a lifetime to decipher and come to terms with.

Third, I have reflected on the opacity of our experience as well as the opacity of the world as we discover how the limits of the world and the limits of the subject are coconstituted. This is why we come across such notions as that of one's complicity in a world in which torture, sexual violence, or other forms of injustice permeate life. Even if I have never participated in any of these atrocities, I have not (at least by my lights) led a blameless ethical life. One continues to be haunted by what is one's responsibility in allowing such a state of affairs to persist as I find in literary texts and in many discussions with my interlocutors. (Here I find an affinity with Laidlaw's rendering of the life of the Jains.) I detect this thought in Hindu and Jain notions of the malignancy of life that generates a certain melancholy about the possibilities of claiming an ethical life for oneself. I show how such concepts as noncruelty are generated as more humble counterparts to any grand conceptions of the ethical. The register of the everyday in which the ethical might be imagined as based on a noncontractual morality is that of keeping faith with those that fate has contingently attached us to. This is a picture of obligation that does not derive from rules or contracts but from a sense of what it is to respond to the need of another. Making a space for the other in our form of life requires a kind of awakening from the trance-like character that everyday life can take and into which we might fall. An example I gave was the imaginary of immigrants swallowing up the way of life of their host countries. Concepts such as xenophobia fail to capture the excess in which hate can take the lethal form of violence that violates our idea of life itself (Das 2007). The problematic here is how forms of life also generate forms of death so that everyday life is not seen as a haven from the tribulations of a horrible world.

At the same time it is in the everyday that we might find the work of repair that is constantly engaged whether through creation of ritual spaces, or through silent unremarkable acts of caring or of absorbing the poisonous knowledge that large and small events secrete into our lives.

Finally, I have suggested through the examples I use the singular individuals from both literature and ethnography who I take as figures of thought, and finally through the conceptual distinctions from Sanskrit texts that I bring into my own text, that what is at stake is not the creation of a specialized vocabulary for rendering ethical life knowable but of asking how spaces of possibility might be opened that allow the foreign-sounding discussions to be absorbed into our own pictures of thinking.[29] Here the issue is what will give concepts life, not how can we use concepts to make evaluative judgments either about individual acts or about whole forms of life? I submit that just as no single culture has a purchase over history so I would say that if our modes of thinking are not open to the other (e.g., Indic, Islamic, Amazonian thought) then our concepts too, like our moral lives, might be in danger of withering away.

Meanwhile the final words belong to Cora Diamond (2000).

We may then think that there is thought and talk that has as its subject matter what the good life is for human beings, or what principles or actions we should accept; so then philosophical ethics will be philosophy of that area of thought and talk. But you do not have to think that; and Wittgenstein rejects that conception of ethics. Just as logic is not, for Wittgenstein, a particular subject with its own body of truths, but penetrates all thought, so ethics has no particular subject matter. Rather, an ethical sprit, an attitude to the world and life, can penetrate any world and thought. So the contrast I want is between ethics conceived as a sphere of discourse among others in contrast with ethics tied to everything there is or can be, the world as a whole, life (Diamond 2000: 153).

In my make-believe language (like that of the invented language of the barbarian women), I conclude with the invocation of a powerful

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29. As with any notion of a "we" the boundaries of this collective first person are left deliberately open—the "we" might expand or contract according to whether I recognize myself in that collectivity. Similarly, I might indeed need concepts to have sharp boundaries when in a court of law or when determining the therapeutic regime for a well-known illness and its protocols for treatment but this is because specificity here responds to a genuine need whereas in other cases boundaries might cut out what might have given one life.

mantra—*ititamamshudhamkritam*—thus all is purified. But as every ritual specialist knows, the residues will acquire a life of their own.

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