Science as Folk-psychology; The Case of Westermarck

What does it mean to give an account of the evolution of moral understanding and moral feelings? (I will not discuss possible distinctions between moral understanding and moral feeling. The same goes for "feeling" and "emotion"). At least it must be completely clear what this morality that, supposedly, has evolved, is about. Evolutionary psychologists usually do not think that this is a problem while moral philosophers more often do. This is reflected by the fact that the view of morals that one finds in evolutionary psychology (EP) is pretty homogenous while the views in moral philosophy (MP) appear to differ wildly. In EP the task is, largely, taken to be to show how evolution proceeded from selfishness to altruism and how co-operation, reciprocity and intelligence assisted this process.

Even if the themes differ more in MP, most of the theories within it share an important fundamental assumption about morals with EP. This assumption is nothing more than an instance of folk-psychoLOGY: Both in EP and most instances of MP it is taken for granted that morals is logically or grammatically dependent on culture or, as I prefer to say; collectivity. (This is not the same as saying that morals is a cultural creation - but the difference is not important for my purposes.) This assumption is mistaken. To be sure there is something that could be called collective morality but it is an outcome of resentment reactions to what is, actually, morally fundamental. (I will use the terms collectivity, collective morality, collective pressure, social and common morals, cultural values and norms, etc., in a rather interchangeable way. What I am aiming at cannot be captured by a definite concept or technical term but by a whole group of interrelated concepts.) The differences between EP and MP are an outcome of the internal tensions and oppositions within collective morality. The most obvious difference is that in MP one finds a certain emphasis on the concept of meaning while in EP this concept is more or less ignored in favour of facts. The idea that morals is grounded in culture admits of many different moral theories: either emphasis can be given to the pole of individuality or then to the pole of sharedness, emphasis can be given to emotions or then to rational judgement, emphasis can be given to principle or then to utility, and so on. Theories based on folk psychology are a bit like persons enthralled by proverbs; those who abide by "Virtue is its own reward" probably do not think highly of those who think that "Don't bite the hand that feeds you" is the wisest thing said.

My aim in this paper is to show how Westermarck's account of morals is based on folk-psychoLOGY. The interesting thing with Westermarck is that he develops his theory in a close critical dialogue with Kantian morals. He tries to make philosophically sense of his theory and he obviously realises what most contemporary evolutionary psychologists do not realise: that when one points to one or the other fact about, say, moral behaviour in animals, it must be quite clear what moral meaning the concepts used have. Contemporary evolutionary psychologists seem largely to believe that the experimental data explains itself; the searched for explanation is "out there" and can be "teased out" with a smart experiment. For instance, Westermarck presumably would discard as senseless Michael Gazzaniga's utterance that desires do not fall out of the bed (yes, "desire" as when you say "I want a beer" - or so I suppose) because "a desire or a belief doesn't get tagged with physical properties [...]" (Gazzaniga 2009, p. 265-66.) What would it mean to say that the brain does tag concepts such as desire and belief with physical properties? Would we in that case speak about desires falling out of the bed?

Westermarck also has many trains of thought in common with contemporary EP. For instance, he thinks that the problem of altruism is central to a naturalist account of morals and he thinks that reciprocity is essential for altruism. He also takes it that moral emotions must have evolved under the pressure of natural selection. Furthermore, he makes quite a lot of work to show how moral feelings are, as he thinks, essentially collective. Though Westermarck notices some rather interesting things that are connected to morals, I think that he thoroughly misinterprets his cases. In much contemporary EP it is simply taken for granted that moral understanding is collective. (There are as many examples of it as one wishes but let me just refer to the above mentioned cognitive neuroscientist: "Virtues are what the culture has defined as morally praiseworthy." The claim is backed up by standard procedures, that is, by pointing to "self-evident" differences between cultural values. Gazzaniga 2008, p. 140.) This, does not mean that EP would not be aware of the existence of social pressure. It means that, just as MP, it is profoundly confused about it. Westermarck tries to show both in what sense moral understanding is collective and how individual moral responsibility could be conceived of. His philosophical claims reveal an important assumption that forms the back-bone not only to collective morality but also to his own thesis as well as to modern EP: The development of morality is taken to be an increasing capacity to impartiality. I shall try to show some oddities with this view.

Chapter 1

Westermarck's general scheme of moral evolution is relatively simple to outline. Before moral feelings have evolved we have only "protective reflex actions" which refer simply to the organisms impulse to defend itself against external threat. This kind of defence does not contain any idea of the enemy suffering; it is purely instrumental. But when organisms become more intelligent, they begin to see the suffering they cause when they defend themselves successfully. Finally, they start to think of causing suffering as an end in itself, quite apart from its defensive effects. This is the birth of something that Westermarck calls retributive emotions. They can be as well negative
(hostile) and positive (kindly) as moral and amoral - and also pre-moral. Concepts of benevolence are fewer and less important than hostile ones but they follow a similar logic. (See Westermarck 1932, p. 87. All references to this work if not otherwise indicated.)

Even if retributive emotions are necessary prerequisites for moral feelings, they are as such not yet moral. A moral feeling is retributive but a retributive feeling is not necessarily moral. A retributive feeling must develop through disinterestedness into impartiality which, finally, is a moral feeling (pp. 62-63, 68-69, 91-95 and 108). Whatever the level of actual impartiality of the moral agent is, it must not be knowingly partial if we are to count her self-understanding as moral (p. 93). Someone who motivates her action by referring to what she wants is not morally motivated. By contrasts, a person who instead refers to what is best for all is, quite regardless of her actual impartiality, morally motivated - or so Westermarck seems to think.

This feeling of impartiality, i.e. that anyone who acts in a certain way must be punished or praised, involves according to Westermarck that morality can come into being only in a social setting. Only when there are shared feelings that express moral indignation or approval about impersonal agents can we speak about morals. This societal side of morals is according to Westermarck clearly perceptible in the important moral role that customs have in every culture. More recent, individualist ideas about morals have their origin in the impersonal generality of cultural customs, only, the former point out biases in the latter (pp. 109-113). Westermarck seems to mean that individual, more rigorously impartial views take their ideas from cultural opinions and elaborate their inherent logic further. This is probably Westermarck's account of the often perceived opposition between collective and personal ideas. They are not opposed but differences of emphasis within the same view. There is a sense in which I think Westermarck is right about this, but not in the way he himself thinks of it. I will come back to it later.

The evolution of moral feeling occurs when hostile and kindly non-moral retributive emotions co-operate, with the instruction of intelligence, to form impartial ideas about retribution. Both kindly and hostile non-moral feelings can be collective. For instance, aggression can quickly spread to the whole group of dogs so that they do not even know why they are angry. When non-moral kindly and hostile feelings start to co-operate this means according to Westermarck that they become impartial. For instance, the desire to have revenge becomes modified by benevolence and develops into punishment. Collectivity and the impartiality that it brings about is necessary for the evolution of morals (pp. 95, 109). It is this claim that I want to take a closer look on.

Collectivity, so Westermarck seems to claim, is somehow a necessary element for the notions of disinterestedness and impartiality. Let us begin with the former. One of the pre-moral stages preceding morality could be exemplified by a case where all monkeys in a flock express their anger at an adult who takes food from an infant monkey. The individual monkeys all feel a sympathetic hostility; they sympathise with the infant monkey and are therefore hostile to the offender on behalf of the infant. Moreover, they could also respond sympathetically to each other's resentment - perhaps even without knowing why the other's are upset. If one monkey is very angry then, just as dogs, the other monkeys in the group may become angry too even if they do not know the cause of first monkey's anger. When an emotion is transmitted through contagion Westermarck seems to think that it is disinterested. If, by contrast, a monkey directly perceives a cause of anger the resulting anger is an expression of interest (p. 106). Resentment is disinterested when it does not directly concern the individual monkey. Even if disinterested resentment is not in itself a moral feeling, it is of "considerable importance both as an originator and a communicator of moral ideas" (loc.cit.). It becomes moral only when it contains moral judgement, for moral judgement is a common, tribal code for what anyone in the tribe has to respect (p. 109). Westermarck takes disinterestedness to be a moral-like feeling from which the impartiality of moral judgement and moral rules evolve. Impartiality is the full-blown moral state and it is essentially collective in the sense that it consists of impersonally sharing "anyone's" moral feelings, values and judgements in a similar way as disinterested feelings consist of being shared. Still further, it is from this strictly collective moral code that the strongly felt personal, moral convictions arise (p. 112). For even if impartiality forms the core of collective moral rules, these rules are often to their actual content far from impartial (I take it that the privileges that certain groups within society have acquired could be an example of this). Individual moral criticism of collective rules capitalises on the formal resources of these rules. When individual and collective moral views run into conflict, it means, according to Westermarck, that a particular person interprets the common concepts of impartiality in a way that expresses a higher standard of right. This also is the way morals have evolved to a higher plane in the process of civilisation (loc.cit.).

Westermarck quite explicitly takes something I will call collective pressure into account. He notes that a harmless act may be felt to be wrong if it is condemned by collective authority (p. 106). However, he does not note the unfortunate significance of this reaction but, rather, uses it as a support for his thesis. Neither does he notice the kind of case where an evil action is, in some sense, felt to be right because collective authority judges it so. Westermarck needs to show that moral understanding is collective and the existence of collective pressure seems, when not sufficiently reflected upon, to prove his
What does "reciprocity of feeling" mean? The concept seems to put forth the idea that an organism not only feels something for other organisms but that it is somehow aware of the fact that they feel something towards it and that the other organisms are aware that the organism in question feels something for them. That new-born chickens cling to any object in their vicinity could be taken as an example of cases where reciprocity is lacking. The chickens do not, it appears, realise that the object to which they have become conditioned does not feel anything for them. I say "appears" because we cannot rule out the possibility that the chickens cling to the first available object in something that resembles the spirit in which small children, and sometimes even adults, cling to a teddy bear.

If "reciprocity of feeling" denotes a particular feeling that is distinguishable from the mere "having a feeling for", then how should that distinction be understood? It seems that with the latter we would have to assume that the whole conception of others having feeling for oneself is lacking. It immediately becomes clear that the concepts of "other" and "self" are at issue here too. If we say that an organism lacks any conception of other organism's having feelings for it, then there is no sense in thinking that that organism would distinguish between organisms and non-living objects. If such a, let me call it "intention blind", organism eats other organisms then we have to assume that the struggles that might be involved in this would have to be equalled to our struggle to break a coconut. But of course this analogy is mostly misleading. I just want to envision an organism that lacks any sense of an other organism struggling against it. Such an organism could not make any important difference between the resistance of other living organisms and that of plants and the physical milieu. A grain of sand that causes pain is not distinguished from a small biting larvae except that, in the case of a successful removal, the latter might turn out to be edible. Sexual reproduction would have to be viewed in a similar way. The other sex is just one possible locus where to deposit the ovum or sperms, i.e.; there is of course no sexual behaviour.

Even if philosophers have tended to question the idea that we can be certain about there being other minds, I still think that the thought that there would be animals that do not have any reciprocity of feeling is confused. Not that there is in philosophical terms any need for it, but this idea could be rejected also on evolutionary terms. For an organism that cannot distinguish between living beings and other objects is unlikely to survive. But, coming back to philosophy, cannot this distinguishing take place without reciprocal feelings? Cannot an organism simply learn that objects of a certain kind are dangerous while others are indifferent and still others good places for hiding or investing the ovum or sperms? This is, in fact, the way EP and cognitive neuroscience account for mutuality among all creatures, humans included. The brain has got a number of computational devices that perform different tasks such as identification, description and evaluation. Emotions are just the outcome of certain
motivational devices. (See for instance Gazzaniga 2008, pp 249 ff.) There are a number of problems with this hypothesis but these must be addressed in a separate paper. In short, one could pose the Wittgensteinian question how these computational devises can know that what I see in front of me is a dangerous predator? (ref*) If we assume that there is a previous, danger-associated brain-representation of it, then how does the device know that this one in front of me is the same as the brain-representation? The kind of concept of representation that we can understand does not contain representations that have the ability to assess themselves as being identical with other representations. (Those who think that I act as a linguistic policeman trying to forbid possible uses of words could perhaps explain to me what it means to speak about a representation that has self-awareness. (ref. to Dennett?) If, on the other hand, the device does not operate with representations, then what role do representations have at all? For if the device knows what to look for without basing this knowledge on a representation, then representations cannot play any important role.

"To have a feeling" means, as far as I can see, "to have feeling for something that has feeling for you". One could say that having feelings is part of experiencing the other creature as living. Even if mistakes are possible, feelings are not hypothetical. The dog's brain does not identify the cat by inner representations. The dog responds to the cat. Evolutionary theory cannot, as a matter of methodological fact, address the question how such a "capacity" should be understood. It must simply be assumed, and assumed to be innate. Thus, as far as evolutionary theory goes, an organism's capacity to recognise other organisms is "blind" in three ways: It is blind in the sense that it must be assumed to be innate, it is blind in the sense that its existence must be taken as a fact and it is blind in the methodological sense that evolutionary theory does not ask the question: "How should that innate capacity be understood?" This, by contrast, is precisely the question I am interested in. It is also a question that neither Westermarck nor modern EP can avoid insofar as they propose to tell us what morality means.

What I have tried to point to with the above reflections is that the concept of feeling involves in itself not only that one recognises another living organism but also that one realises that that other organisms has feelings towards you. This is what it means to recognise another living organism as against bumping into a dead body. "Mutual feeling" is therefore a tautology. If in some cases we cannot see any sense in saying that an organism reacts with feeling towards us or other creatures, then this amounts to saying that in one important respect we do not respond to it as a living thing. (This point cannot, however, be made from the armchair for we can learn a lot about animal behaviour.)

I do not imply that everyday uses of "mutual feeling" are always confused - or that they are always in order. Often "mutual feeling" is used to indicate that two persons acknowledge that they both have a certain feeling - often but not necessarily a positive one - for each other. For Westermarck, however, mutuality has an moral-epistemological meaning. In his view the "instinctive desire to inflict counter-pain" is an essential characteristic of moral indignation (p. 85). This implies that the evolution of morals involves the evolution of a recognition that one inflicts pain to another organism. A primitive organism just defends itself by a "protective reflex action" that does not contain any notion of causing pain to the offender. With increasing intelligence comes the recognition of causing pain and the desire to cause pain (pp. 68, 86-87). The logic for retributive kindliness is the same: "[I]n the lower forms of retributive kindliness there can be no definitive desire to produce pleasure" (p. 86). Reciprocity of feeling can be found among animals that live in groups and find "pleasure in each other's company". This involves that they feel kindness towards the cause of the pleasure, i.e. the other animal (p. 87). Without such reciprocity, Westermarck says, "[t]he altruistic sentiment would never have come into existence" (pp. 87-88).

One cannot explain the evolution of moral feelings by characterising them as reciprocal for, as I have shown, reciprocity is included in any concept of feeling. Should one then conclude that all animals are to various degrees moral? Perhaps, but the problem is that it is quite unclear what this would mean. I shall not discuss this issue but instead point out why the concept of reciprocity is so important to Westermarck. It is equally important to contemporary EP and for the same reasons, but I cannot show it here.

Westermarck accepts the apparently almost universal, folk-psychological idea that moral understanding is essentially characterised by impartiality. (I will later say a few things about the appeal of this presupposition.) The idea of impartiality involves that certain relevant feelings and ways of understanding are taken to be detached from purely personal pleasure and purely personal interests. The moral person gives each and everyone according to what is due to her or him. The idea seems to be that if it were not for humanity's surprising, cultural achievement namely morals, selfishness would be rampant. Some would say, together with Westermarck, that we can see in animals pre-moral responses, more specifically, in their mutual feelings of sympathy. Here the collectivising formula is repeated, for the highest feelings are, supposedly, to be found among gregarious animals. They are not only interested in their own offspring but also in the other animals of the group. This is a first sign of disinterestedness and so of morals (p. 87). It is important to notice how the ideas of collectivity and selfishness are related and how both are just folk-psychological myths and nothing more.
The other central supposition is that of impartiality. It is important because it seems to give support to the idea that moral understanding is essentially collective. When selfishness is taken to be universal, then any feeling that seems to be non-selfish is taken to be at once a sign of disinterestedness and collective belonging. On this understanding, reciprocity seems to be the first step of seeing something besides own interests and pleasures. However, having feelings for the own offspring is, presumably, still too determined by "genetic" selfishness in order to indicate any higher degree of disinterestedness. But when animals start to "take pleasure in each other’s company", as Westermarck puts it (loc. cit.), disinterestedness and altruism are present. The "highest" point of disinterestedness is displayed in modern culture with its impartial concept of justice. What are these ideas of disinterestedness and impartiality that are taken to be morally essential and that are taken to guide the evolution of morals? I shall approach this question by way of a detour to the question of mutuality of feeling, how it could be scientifically assessed and how customs and morals could be related.

How should one asses that a creature recognises that it causes pain, that it causes pleasure and that some other creature causes pain or pleasure to it? Together with this we must also ask ourselves what it means for a scientist to claim that a certain animal recognises the cause of pleasure while another animal does not. These both questions are implied when one asks whether it is an empirical fact that the chimpanzee recognises another chimpanzee as a cause of pleasure and that the corresponding recognition of, say, a shark is insignificant by comparison. If one thinks that this is the case, then it can be asked whether it is also an empirical fact that concentration-camp guards mostly do not recognise the pain they inflict to others while mothers bandaging wounds on their children mostly do. If the latter question appears different, then let us not - at least yet - be distracted by our inclination to say that all human beings should realise such and such things. For it appears that some simply do not. Or do they? How should it be assessed?

If there are human beings who do not realise that they inflict pain - as in fact there appears to be - then it follows that neither can they tell the difference between concentration-camp guards and loving mothers. It also follows that if such persons are scientists, then they cannot see any important difference between the feelings of chimpanzees and those of sharks. Only if one acknowledges morals can one assess whether or not a certain behaviour is or is not moral. To make assessments about the moral status of animals is, then, not a matter of scientific qualification but of moral commitment. (It is another matter that certain empirical data, such as data on brain activity, can be gathered once the moral issue with its assumed behaviour - "Do chimpanzees feel empathy?" - has been determined.) Can science make use of such commitment? Well, why not, but then it must be prepared to take into account criticism that is based in moral understanding and the present paper is an instance of such criticism.

Chapter 3

Westermarck's view on morals seems to be that people do in fact acknowledge morals and that some people are more concerned about it than others. Madmen and children, he seems to think, have some kind of lack in their moral concern (p. 157). One wonders what Westermarck would have said about the different cases of genocide in our contemporary culture. It is not that genocide did not occur earlier but, rather, that it was considered something natural until the Second World War. Until this point, it was a generally held view that the "inferior" non-European races will die out when coming into contact with the "superior" European races. (ref. *) Whether this happened by way of genocide, slavery or epidemics was not considered important. The question I pose Westermarck is: How should one understand cases where one people or culture more or less exterminates another; are the individuals of the perpetrating culture morally responsible? Even if Westermarck's thesis can, in an unsatisfactory way, account for the fact that there are individuals that have a stronger moral commitment than the rest of the people in a culture, his thesis cannot make it clear on what grounds the murderous majority could be held morally responsible. Morality is, on Westermarck's account, a sum of collective moral judgements with their underlying moral emotions. If the members of a collective "feel" that they "must" exterminate another collective, then how could that be morally wrong? Because certain high-minded individuals feel that this acting is not impartial enough? Why would such a notion of impartiality have any moral force at all? If it later acquires such a force within the collective this is irrelevant for the question how it could have any moral significance when it is not yet part of collective understanding.

I will take it for granted that the individuals of the perpetrating culture are morally responsible and though it is not my main point to show why this is so, it is nevertheless part of my point. The fact that all of the members of a collective can act in morally corrupt ways, points to something that I have already hinted at, namely that moral understanding cannot be viewed as a fact about a certain collective, i.e.; it cannot be viewed as a fact in the sense that the concept is used in natural science. Morality can be meaningfully discussed only by those who are committed to morality - whatever that means. Whether or not someone is morally committed cannot be assessed by way of empirical investigations but must be assessed within moral discourse. This claim is no more surprising than if I were to "claim" that the skills of a chess-player must be assessed within the discourse of chess-playing and not, say, by the discourse of jurisprudence.

Let us think about the concept of custom that is so central for Westermarck. He says that custom is a moral rule and the "ethical aspect" of custom is nothing more than a "generalization of emotional tendencies". These tendencies acquire
their role of custom when they are taken to be a norm for everyone (p. 111). It is true that people tend to respond to violations of custom with an indignation that seems to be very close to moral indignation. In many European countries it was taken to be very important that if a man and a woman live together they must be married. People who violated this custom were taken to be immoral. Generally speaking, sexual customs have been taken to be particularly essential for morality. In fact, up till the 60ties it was not uncommon to more or less identify "morals" with "sexual morals". Today, the normative aspect of marriage has almost disappeared even if the custom remains. How should this be accounted for?

What is the difference between a custom that places no normative demands on people and one that does? In what sense are societal values normative? In cases where they seem to be normative, can they be the same token be called moral? To begin with the last question, "success" is in all its vagueness clearly a normative value; it places a normative perspective on the way people plan their lives and assess each other. Still, to be or not to be successful is not a moral issue. However, to be critical of this value can be seen as a moral concern. Obviously collective norms can be of a kind that cannot be considered moral. If we think of the role of money, it seems to be a value that embarrasses us and we often do not want to admit to what extent we consider it a value. To realise this is in fact a moral task. (For more on the unacknowledged and unconscious aspects of social values, see Žižek 1989.)

How should one understand the dynamics of collective values and customs? What is involved when they are not normative (such as marriage today), when they are normative but not moral and when they, supposedly, are moral? I think that the best way to approach the issue and avoid making a glut of distinctions is to consider a conflict between a personal, moral understanding and collective values. Consider a case where a homosexual couple moves into a small town where people strongly disagree with homosexuality. You witness a lot of "moral" condemnation that is all based on the assumed immorality of homosexuality. Would it be illuminating to say that if you oppose this collective condemnation this is because you have a more rigorous concept of impartiality than the others? Is not impartiality used to indicate that a person views a conflict without supporting any party or that she thinks that everyone should be treated according to the established moral standards? The concept has got nothing to do with question whether something can be considered moral or immoral.

If you would be merely impartial in your involvement in the above conflict, this would mean only that you think that the homosexual couple should be treated fairly, i.e. according to the established moral norms. When it comes to impartiality, you could thus say the same things in your defence of the homosexual couple as you would if you would defend ruthless drug-dealers: "Don't accuse them for things they have not done", "Don't judge them unduly harshly", "Give them a change to defend themselves", "Don't harass their children - they are not guilty of anything", etc. But when the issue is about the claim that homosexuality is immoral the concept of impartiality is of no use. Your horror at the way the people in the small town are bullying the couple has got nothing to do with being or not being impartial. You think that the people in the town are immoral. It is important to show some of the details of the conflict between you and the others; the collective. There is an other, hidden interest of "impartiality". For when impartiality is invoked, then anyone who follows her conscience is by the same token characterised as someone who is not impartial. If you think it is wrong to condemn the homosexual couple, you are from the collective point of view defending them; siding with them, against the collective. "Being impartial" can only mean that one sees to it that the normal, formal procedures of the collective are taken into account. Being impartial does not at all imply that you will see the two persons of the couple as they are. (I will soon come to what this means.) It amounts to taking the perspective of the collective. "Impartiality" is one of the values of collectivity.

The collective thinks that you go against common moral values. Let us assume that despite your criticism of the collective, you are concerned about common values. This means that you feel guilt for going against them. To say that you are simply aware of the fact that you go against these values - which is of course also possible - means that you do not feel guilt. What does it mean to feel guilt? Does it mean that you think that you have wronged someone and that homosexuality may after all be immoral? We must proceed slower here. To the extent that you feel guilt you accept the perspective of being an object of moral censure. That is, you accept that your acting is judged by common moral standards. By these standards you appear guilty. (The fact that you could be acquitted by reference to these same standards does not change my point.) Your "moral" feeling consists in a feeling of being an object of moral indignation: "Maybe what I am doing is wrong? Maybe I am a bad person." It is important to notice both the passive and aggressive character of this perspective: You are an object of "moral" disapproval. This is the grammar of the perspective and this is not changed by the fact that it is you yourself who raises the question. The grammar of the perspective shows how both you and the others conceive of the issue.

Since, as I suppose, you do not give in for the collective values you must entertain some other kind of consideration too. What is that? There are many possibilities but I will discuss only one of them since it illuminates the other ones as well. It could be that when you think of condemning the homosexual couple the way others do, what strikes you is the two persons themselves, each of them separately. At the thought of these persons you feel that you simply cannot join the choir of accusers. What is this feeling? Westermarck thinks that it is based on retributive kindly feelings that become first altruistic, then disinterested and finally, through collectivisation, impartial: "The fact that the earliest moral emotions were public emotions implies that the original form of
relationships to the near and dear but about the way one perceives the other. When I am an I in the strongest sense, then I will feel the two persons of the couple in terms of "you". If I suppress my I and become collective I will perceive these persons in terms of "they": they who are such and such and who do not belong to "us". It is interesting to note that without noticing it, Westermarck himself makes statements that show that he actually and unconsciously thinks that conscience precedes collective pressure (though there is not enough space to explore the unconscious and repressed aspects of this).

Westermarck many times uses expressions such as "custom is a tyrant", "custom is a rule of conduct", "custom demands", and so on. It might seem natural to think that of course the existence of a custom presupposes that it has authority. But as I showed with marriage this is not at all necessary. Nowadays the custom of getting married is upheld without authority. In this case custom does not demand at all. So what is at stake with customs that do demand? Could it not be simply a demand to conform? Yes, but why is conformity so important in some cases? If custom is, not only the only moral perspective there is, but also the birth-place of all morals, then how could one even conceive of anything that goes against it? Languages usually do not contain demands that refer to themselves as the only authoritative language that "must" be used by all native speakers. In earlier times, even when foreign languages were known to exist, the native language was for most people the only language they were able to speak. The idea of tyrannically demanding that only the native language should be used is (apart from very particular historical circumstances) absurd. Why is it that customs are so keen about their own authority? Or has Westermarck just been caught up in a dramatic language use that has no deep connections to the role customs actually have? Certainly not.

There is a deep conflict between you and the citizens of the small town. They think that you violate their values. This is what makes them feel violent feelings against you. You, like the homosexual couple, scorn their way of living and take "way of living" to be the same as morals. (In the movie "Mississippi Burning" this attitude acquires its right temperature when one of the white racist southerners with an intense hatred hisses between his teeth to the FBI agent investigating a murder with racist motives: "We don't need you northerners to tell us how to live our lives!") Collective pressure expresses a feeling of being threatened by you: "Who do you think you are?", "Do you think you are a better person than the rest of us?", "So you imagine that you know what is right and what is wrong and that everyone else is in error!", etc. Consequently, it tries to threaten you to abandon your conscience. There is in other words a connection between collective pressure and conscience. Your moral feeling and your moral understanding of your fellow human being - conscience - is your fundamental understanding of other people. This understanding is connected to the fact that human beings enjoy each others company. But they also have difficulties with each other. In order that these difficulties should not lead to outrageous actions,

the moral consciousness cannot [...] have been the individual conscience" (p. 113). Now there are indeed public emotions and they can be sympathetic too. If you would, after all, join in the collective criticism of the couple, people would turn sympathetic towards you. The perspective and the grammar is the same as in moral blame. You are an object of judgement, only, now you are judged to be good and this means: one of "us". You have submitted yourself to collective pressure.

(John Grisham's book Skipping Christmas is a good example of how a writer can give a good picture of collective pressure without understanding a what about is at stake. In this story, the Kranks decide not to celebrate Christmas but are severely pressured to do so by their neighbours. In the end the Kranks give in for the pressure and after this their neighbours are again friendly and helping towards them. Christmas is not only about commercialism or critique of commercialism but also about belonging to the collectivity - this seems to be a corrupt message of the book. You have to buy things and hang small lights in the trees in your garden in order to maintain the good spirit in the collective. That the reviewers in Amazon.com mostly interpret the book as a wonderful book about friendship and belonging is not surprising. Luckily, there are those who see through it too.)

When you feel horror at intimidating the couple, what you feel differs importantly from collective pressure. The perspective is not one of judgement. You do not make any assessments about the couple nor do you think about their social belongings. In fact, what you feel amounts to a rejection of the collective pressure. It is a rejection of this perspective among other things in that you reject the grammar of moral judgement with its passivity and aggression and instead allow your own, active feelings and thoughts to guide your acting. It is very important to notice that in this case we have a thinking and feelings that express your own active understanding. What you perceive is not a threat backed up by authoritative, common values but two human beings. And when you allow yourself to perceive these two human beings you could not possible want to harm them. In my view it is here that we see conscience. In this perspective, as Heidegger notes, what is most own to us and he is partly right about this (see Heidegger 1992, §§ 55, 56). Conscience cannot be accounted for in terms of collective pressure. In fact, collective pressure is a repressive response to conscience (while the opposite is not true) but I cannot show this in the present paper. As for now it suffices for me to point out that there is a conflict between conscience and collective pressure. If I follow my conscience I can be excluded from the community. I can find myself in the same situation as the homosexual couple. Whatever the case, following one's conscience is not applauded by collectivity. In my conscience I perceive the other as you; not as a member of a collective. What is most own to me is the conscientious perception of you (this is something that Heidegger does not notice). By saying this I also want to point to the grammar of the perspective. The I-you relationship is not about exclusive
Westermarck is interesting because he does not start with the assumption that human acting is regulated by custom, moral norms and laws. As long as we have historical records, there have been difficulties to keep in mind that the customs of a culture are not identical with morals, but that there is something that is morally more fundamental than they. One could say that both Socrates and Jesus were in their different ways addressing this issue.

I cannot discuss the conflict between conscience and collective pressure any further, but it is important to see that the latter is a response to the former. This is why it makes sense to say that custom is a tyrant, that it demands submission and that "no man must have a private conscience" (p. 109, my italics). If Westermarck's account would be correct it would make no sense to speak about a private conscience. What he gives us is instead many different versions of the way collective pressure asserts itself by threatening those who are about to depart from it and condemning those who are concerned by their conscience. It seems to me that in his eagerness to prove that morality has its origin in society, Westermarck does not pay attention to the fact that the kind of things he refers to reveal the resentment of social norms - collective pressure - not the character of moral responses. The feeling that you cannot let down the homosexual couple contains no resentment and cannot be understood in terms of reciprocity either. This, in my view, is a moral response or, in other words: to hear one's conscience. It is not correct to characterise conscience as something private for it addresses another human being, only, not in the objectifying manner of collective pressure but in terms of you being active and, by this, perceiving another human being. A lot more could be said about this but there is no room for that. (ref *)

**Chapter 4**

The idea that moral understanding is fundamentally social is almost without exception taken to be self-evident, i.e.; not even worthy of critical inquiry. At the same time it is often pointed out both by moral philosophers such as Socrates, Kant, Nietzsche (in his peculiar way) and many Wittgensteinian philosophers that moral responsibility has an non-reducibly personal aspect to it. How the social and personal features are related to each other has remained obscure. Collectivity is, however, almost universally endorsed - often also by those who emphasise the importance of the personal responsibility. This makes it motivated to characterise it as an instance of folk-psychology. Both Westermarck and modern EP have been taken in by this idea. Both of them also think that they show the way to a scientific explanation of the folk-psychological understanding of morals but actually they are only new versions of it; versions that are couched in certain evolutionary, psychological and philosophical terms that are in their turn linked together by a mishmash of folk-psychological ideas, moral philosophical claims, empirical hypotheses, rhetorical strategies and outright speculation.

Westermarck is interesting because he does not start with the assumption that all organisms are essentially selfish. (There have in EP been debates about how selfishness should be understood, but only those uses of the concept that can have relevance for the project of explaining moral psychology need to be considered here. And these meanings are the moral ones. It is not possible to get around this fact by distinguishing between ultimate and proximal explanations as some contemporary evolutionary psychologists have done (ref. Vromen*).) When something like "original sympathy" is accepted, this binds the researcher in certain ways. She can, firstly, simply give up the project of explaining the evolution of morals and point to the "fact" that organisms do seem to enjoy each other's company to various degrees and then go on to use this observation for different purposes. There need be no problem with such a procedure - on the contrary, it is commendable - but I do not have much to say about it.

Secondly, if the researcher, like Westermarck, wants to explain the evolution of morals, she has to suppose that moral feelings are either originally subjective or that they have developed when organisms interact with each other. The latter option is obviously the one Westermarck chose. Of course, also certain "subjective capacities" such as taking pleasure in togetherness and intelligence were presupposed so that interaction could generate moral feelings. These capacities together with interaction "produced" at first primitive forms of collectivity, that is: reciprocity and altruistic feelings. Later on this primitive collectivity in concert with an ever higher intelligence and ever keener feeling of mutual sympathy, generated genuine moral understanding which is characterised by impartiality. The remarkable thing is that even if a child's formative experiences are not social but take place with particular persons in an I-you setting, it has still been taken for granted that "interaction between organisms" must be understood as a fundamentally social phenomenon. Moral responses just as all other aspects of interpersonal communication are taken to be social and to be a good communicator is the same as having good social skills. The meaning of "good" is in these connections actually identical with "social": Good social skills are "social" in the sense that they are appreciated by the majority if the collectivity. Also, "sympathetic" and "social" are mostly taken to be more or less synonymous. A person with good social skills is a person who is considered to be sympathetic and mostly this is taken to mean also that the person in question is a morally good person. A morally good person is, in other words, considered to be sympathetic by the majority of the collectivity; she is social. This involves that she shares the values of the majority.

The sympathy of the person with good social skills is not directed at anyone in particular. This, in fact, is the character of the sympathy we are discussing. Most people can be sympathetic to their near and dear (though without doubt there would be much to say about this too). What distinguishes the sympathetic social person is that she is generally speaking sympathetic; "everyone loves her". But there is no idea about the sympathetic person loving everyone. Rather,
resentment for it need not contain any wish to suppress that lifestyle, i.e.; it need not be an instance of culturally conditioned hostility or, in other words, culturally conditioned hostility, as far as the sympathy of the sympathetic person goes, she does not choose sides in a conflict. She only refers to common values and norms. Her sympathy is impersonal ("I wish no one would run into the kind of troubles you have run into") and so is her acting ("But these are the rules; I cannot help you."). But is "impartial" the same as "impersonal"? And how should we understand this notion of sympathy?

According to Westermarck, the origins of morality is to be sought in the kind of emotions that a person with social skills is displaying. Westermarck seems to be right at least in the sense that such emotions exist, that they do in fact have the character that he ascribes to them and that they are in fact mostly taken to be moral. Also, these emotions are rooted in common, custom values and norms and they are characterised by an impartial sympathy. For Westermarck and most other persons this amounts to saying that the emotions in question are moral, but this is the move I have been questioning.

The kind of sympathy that the socially skilled person displays would not help a homosexual couple that is bullied by society. This "impartial" sympathy does not address particular persons but is, rather, a celebration of whatever responses the majority of a collective might have. The socially skilled person would, as far as her specific sympathy goes, let the homosexual couple down. This is because she does not have sympathy for the other but a sympathy for the collective. (The wish to please together with vanity are important aspects of this sympathy. There are many further ramifications and connections but we cannot go into them here.) When one sees how collectivity runs into conflict with individuals and groups that challenge it - here one could think of the role scapegoats have had through history - then one also sees that the conflict between collectivity and personal moral responses, conscience, is not fortuitous or coincidental. Instead, the former, collective pressure, is a resentment reaction to the latter. (The word "personal conscience" is a pleonasm and probably only part of collective efforts to marginalise conscience by making it appear a subjective whim.)

Thus, it is true that there is a certain connection between (i) resentment and something that looks like (ii) sympathy and, furthermore, something that looks like (iii) impartiality, only, not in the way Westermarck suggests. (i) The resentment is a morally related aggression in that it is a hostility towards those who question the norms of collectivity. The resentment is actually a way of suppressing a moral perspective. (If one personally dislikes a certain way of living whether within or outside of one's own culture, this need not be resentment for it need not contain any wish to suppress that lifestyle, i.e.; it need not be an instance of culturally conditioned hostility or, in other words, collective pressure.)

(ii) The sympathy is actually not a sympathy for particular persons but an emotion that expresses a solidarity with cultural norms, traditions and forms of behaviour (and a certain personal ability to manifest such a solidarity in a generally appealing way). This generalised, "friendly" attitude can very well stretch itself to respect the habits of foreign cultures. It shows its lack of sympathy for particular persons in that it does not concern itself with individuals who run into conflict with collectivity.

(iii) As already noted, "impartiality" is a misleading concept to use here in any case and the same is true about "disinterestedness". To adopt a generalised sympathy is a way of seeking (though usually not consciously) general acceptance; "popularity", which is why it involves that one shuns conflicts with the collective. It is in this sense not at all disinterested. The generalised sympathy is, then, neither impartial nor disinterested in the way these words are used by Westermarck and many evolutionary psychologists. (Since the generalised, social sympathy is a form of ingratiating, it is repressed; something which is not lessened by the fact that both EP and modern business life takes this "impression management" to be an aspect of morals.)

One could claim that Westermarck's use of concepts is not identical with folk-psychological uses but a scientific extension of them. Whatever the case, it would have to be shown both in what sense the sympathy in question can be understood in a moral light and how its moral sense is underpinned by a collective meaning. I have pointed to one possible meaning of "impartial" sympathy and it is indeed collective in character but it involves a rejection of what I think moral sympathy or, as I prefer to say; being concerned by one's conscience, means.

Chapter 5

I shall now try to bring out the logic of Westermarck's view. With this I mean that I am not necessarily giving an account of the way he expresses himself but, rather, of what I with reference to the above discussions take to be involved in his view. - The idea that all creatures are at bottom selfish is internally connected with the idea that morals is essentially collective. This shows itself in that an assumed state where an organism's all feelings and actions express a concern for itself as a vehicle for propagating its genes is taken to be the self-evident starting point for moral evolution and that this evolution amounts to a collectivisation of this originally selfish concern. That an organism feels anything at all for another organism is the first step away from selfishness. However, the most primitive feelings are still very far determined by selfishness: spreading genes and promoting subjective feelings of pleasure. When an
organism can have feelings for many other organisms, as seems to be the case with gregarious animals, we approach the state of morality. And when these feelings promote a moral understanding where the well being of any other individual is felt to be important, we have reached human culture and morality. (To see whether Westermarck’s, and EP’s, constant references to “higher” morals and intelligence can avoid being teleological would be an interesting task in itself.)

The central, logical presupposition here is that the evolution of morality consists of a gradual depersonalisation of an originally completely selfish concern for reproduction and well-being. Morality is a form of concern where no one in particular is the object of the concern. This idea lies at the core of Westermarck’s thesis. He, as it were, looks around in society and accepts, obviously without any criticism, the dominating collective myth (forming the background of both Kantianism and utilitarianism) about morality, namely that it is socially determined. (However, the important thing here is not to establish “how” pervasive this view is. The important thing is to show the logic of collective morality.) There are different opinions about the moral status of customs, cultural values and norms and, more importantly, about cases where an individual opposes common moral standards. Some think that an individual cannot intelligibly question common morals while others, such as Westermarck, think that it is possible that such questioning is a proof of a higher moral awareness. Still others think that moral obligations are not cultural but universal and valid for any rational creature. It can be shown that this view cannot really be distinguished from the idea that morality is collectively determined, but I cannot do it here. (To indicate the line of thought, universalism has the same grammar as collectivism and falls prey to the same kind of criticism as the latter.) Whatever opinions there are about conflicts between individuals and collectivity, the point is to see how there can be such conflicts and how they should be accounted for - and as I showed, there are important cases that Westermarck cannot account for.

When it is taken for granted that moral engagement is a disinterested and impartial engagement (this curious notion that Kant struggled so hard with to make sense of) then universal selfishness is already, knowingly or unknowingly, presupposed. Or better: selfishness and impartiality form the opposite and interdependent poles in the collective conception of morals. They form a conceptual association where the one cannot be thought without the other. Affirming one of them against the other amounts to remaining within the same outlook. Some evolutionary psychologists seem to think that genuinely caring for others is inconceivable (ref *). This idea is badly confused but since it is not very common we can ignore it. More insidious views talk a lot about altruism but express themselves in ways which do not really leave any room for anything else besides selfishness. The real problem is that the idea of universal selfishness can secretly determine how morals is understood without there being any explicit statements about the priority of selfishness. Westermarck is one example.

Westermarck clearly thinks that animals and humans really take pleasure in each other’s company and that this involves a growing awareness of the other. He does not say that this is all just different forms of selfishness. However, he pictures the assumed growing sense for the other, with its culmination in current conceptions of justice, as a growing distance to one’s own interests and one’s individual feelings of pleasure, i.e.: to selfishness. What I have tried to show is that moral engagement cannot be understood either in terms of selfishness, altruism or impartiality. Impartiality refers to a position within collectivity, more specifically to cases where a person is viewing a situation without personal interest or emotion while altruism refers to the impersonal, collective sympathy.

The impartial observer can assess the situation without being tempted by own interests or mislead by strong emotions. But when these risks are eliminated, what is an appropriate judgement like? Is it not what can, given the cultural values, be understood as appropriate? Impartiality cannot, contrary to what Westermarck believes, create any moral standard. Impartiality signifies a certain impersonal stance within all conceivable interests and emotions. The impersonal stance involves an effort to assess what is reasonable, i.e.: what any rational person in the given culture would accept as a balanced and appropriate judgement. All the interests and emotions are already there and so is the form of life with its necessities and luxuries. Impartiality and judgement are concepts that have their meaning within an existing standard, that is: within a cultural setting.

The way I see it, a moral problem can never be accounted for in the above terms. This becomes quite clear in the case with the homosexual couple. To see each of them in the light of one’s conscience does not at all touch upon concepts of the kind discussed above, on the contrary: What is perceived to be wrong in the collective view is precisely that it amounts to determining the life of human beings on the grounds of common values. In other words; if you let down the couple you will fall into the collective conceptuality and so you will assess, criticise, blame, admit, balance, justify, etc. If you are exceptionally impartial you might come to the conclusion that the couple has a right to live their lives the way they want just as anyone else has, that they are not harming anyone else, etc. In this case you would on Westermarck’s terms be dissenting from the orthodox views of morality and you would also try to raise the latter to your own standard (p. 112). This certainly is a possibility but it is wholly within collectivity and does not amount to seeing the two persons in question. It is of course also possible that your impartial defence does not express the way you see things but only the way you present the issue to collectivity. You know that this is the only argument that “they” might accept. This means that you do not think that any argument in the favour of the couple is needed nor even morally
relevant. The argument is only a tool to silence the collective and of course, the proper argument is the one that employs the concept of impartiality.

But if you take your own argument seriously, this means that you do think that the collective indignation against the love between the two persons has something to it. What you conclude is, in this case, that even if you personally dislike this kind of love, you must allow it because impartiality demands it. (Liberalism emphasises this formal side of collective morality while socialism emphasises the collective demand for equity.) This shows, again, how collective "morality" consists in avoiding to take issue with particular persons and instead decide things on the basis of impersonal principles that, depending on moral opinions and context, are celebrated as justice, impartiality, moral law, altruism, fairness, equity, and so on (as should be pretty obvious, emphasising the context at the cost of rational principle takes us nowhere here). If, by contrast, you attend in conscience to the two persons, the idea of questioning their love does not even enter your mind. This is what I in this connection mean by "to attend to someone in conscience". Escaping one's conscience means that one starts to justify, assess, judge, in short; that one falls into depersonalised or collective thinking. I cannot go further into the issue of what it means to attend to someone in conscience but let me just indicate that lying, being violent, being envious, etc., prevents one from reaching out to a person whether it is I or the other who lies or is violent or envious. If you face a person who is hateful to the homosexual couple, attending to her in conscience would mean that you try to make her see the evil in her attitude. If she would see it, this means that you could reach her - for instance you could speak openly about homosexuality - while if she would maintain her hateful attitude you could not reach her. Here I must leave the immensely important "communicative" aspect of morals; something that I have in other places called openness (ref *).

For the sake of clarity I have presented a moral difficulty as a conflict between an individual and collectivity, but this can also be misleading. The issue cannot be captured by thinking of it as a conflict between the individual in the sense "one particular person" and collectivity in the sense "a socially coherent group of people". The conflict is, rather, between the I-you perspective of conscience and collective pressure. In some cases, yielding to collective pressure shows itself in such a way that the individual person visibly merges with a social group (such as if a person who would have yielded to the collective condemnation of homosexuality in our previous example). Mostly, however, moral conflicts cannot be depicted in this way. Think of a case where a person relates to her children in terms of selfishness and self-sacrifice. If what she does seem to fall on the side of selfishness she would, it seems, have to reconsider what she is doing. If, again, she often sacrifices herself for the sake of her children she might have to consider whether and to what extent this is a wise thing to do. A very likely "wise" advice that this person might get would go something like this: "Of course one often has to make sacrifices but it is also important that one every now and then thinks of oneself." To make sacrifices to a "reasonable" extent is important so that the other members of the family get what they have a right to get while to think of oneself to a "proper" degree is justified because "one is worth it" (to speak with this advertisement-slogan that easily strikes a solemn mood in us even if long eyelashes may not be everyone's favourite indicator of worthiness). And of course, "reasonable" and "proper" are determined by collective values or, rather: They are determined by the way they are used within a form of life. The fact that the person understands herself in terms of selfishness and self-sacrifice reveals that she avoids her children and falls into collective pressure.

If, again, she would attend in conscience to her children, she would not, whatever else she might say and do, think of herself as being either selfish or self-sacrificing. She would try to solve her problems by attending to her children; not by trying to strike a proper balance according to common views. Most essentially, our falling into collective pressure does not show itself in our standing in a crowd of unanimous people but in our thinking in a certain way, i.e.; in terms of that grammar of avoidance that characterises collective pressure.

Many philosophers would say that what is meant by being selfish, being considerate and sacrificing oneself is constituted by culture. In more refined accounts this is not taken to mean that culture provides a normative standard but that our common language determines what kinds of things it makes sense to say. (ref*) I do not oppose these accounts. My point is that the whole perspective of egosim and altruism - with its further possibilities such as being selfish, being considerate and sacrificing oneself - acquires its meaning because we tend to shut our eyes before the importance of caring for the other. I hinted at this difficulty with my example with the homosexual couple, but also close relationships can, as we all know, be difficult. (Of course, interpersonal relationships can be terrible only because they are so important to us, but I cannot discuss this topic any further.)

**Conclusion**

It is often not noticed that to try to give an account of morals is itself a moral problem. Modern EP takes it for granted that there are no particular problems with giving an account of morals: "One just takes a look on how people actually think in moral matters instead of racking one's brain with the sophistries of some high-brow philosopher who thinks that she knows what moral reasoning 'has to' mean." This could be the slogan of many "humble-minded" evolutionary psychologist. (You could find as many examples as you wish but I just refer to Hauser 2006, pp. 132 ff.) At the same time as this humble attitude leads evolutionary psychologists to override ordinary moral thinking in a way that most of the moral philosophers - such as Kant - that they criticise would not dream of, they take without noticing it as their fundamental presuppositions
certain moral ideas that are nothing more than part of a collective mythology. It is possible to create many different moral views on the basis of this mythology and this of course is also what has been actually done. Some of these views make use of a rich selection of moral concepts (Kant, Freud, Weil, Gaita, Lear, Zizek, to name a few (ref"?)) while others are rather austere. The latter is generally the case with EP. It takes the folk-psychological idea of collectivity for granted and then undulates between the interdependent concepts of egoism and altruism. Even if Westermarck partly shares the unsuspecting attitude of EP, he is more interesting because he struggles hard to give an account of all the moral possibilities he notices. He seems to realise that science must be able to give an account of ordinary experiences without reducing them away. (Something that M. Ruse and E. O. Wilson do not see. One is tempted to say that they do not function properly when they say that "human beings function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking that there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which all should obey." Ruse and Wilson 2006, p. 560.) For instance, Westermarck realises that the moral ideas expressed by a particular person cannot be viewed as a fact; as one moral preference among many others. He sees that an individual moral point of view can be morally challenging for the whole community and, in fact, thinks that this is an important instance of moral progress. It is his readiness to acknowledge certain moral possibilities that takes him to moral landscapes where his naturalism reveals its inadequacy. A naturalist must be very careful about what kind of instances of moral meaning she acknowledges. One cannot blame EP for not understanding this danger.

Westermarck's effort to show how morality evolves and how this evolution involves a process of collectivisation, fails. This is an important finding, for most theories in EP takes moral collectivism for granted. I do not mean that they think that morality is social, for what they want to show is precisely that it is in an important sense biological. What I mean is, firstly, that what EP takes as instances of moral behaviour are, in my experience, without exception examples of what I would call collective pressure. Secondly, EP wants to show that the evolution of mutuality, co-operation, altruism and, finally, social morals is biologically determined. The description of what they think they are explaining is an instance of collective pressure or, otherwise expressed, folk-psychology. My point has been to show that morals is about the I-you relationship. This relationship can be understood neither in biological (to have to say this is embarrassing) nor in collective terms. Perhaps one could call it, with whatever seriousness this could have, the brains own construct intended only for the brain itself. I want to end my paper with a short philosophical speculation on this theme.

Who can claim that the brain could not transcend natural selection? The brain, I suspect, realised long ago that everywhere in nature there was only selfishness and struggle for the most obvious things: food, protection and reproduction - and the brain was disgusted. It created its own discourse; a discourse that expresses the brain's understanding of things. In this discourse nature, when understood in its vulgar sense (food, protection and reproduction), was taken to be something low and primitive; something the brain had seen through and transcended. Within the brains own discourse, utility, natural necessity, natural inclination, etc. became more and more condemned and replaced by ideas of eternal truth, goodness and beauty. It is only when this discourse had been produced that the very special and limited preoccupation with science became possible at all. Without doubt the brain has a tendency to become arrogant and so, by and by, it has fallen prey to internal contradictions. Today's EP and cognitive neuroscience are results of the euphoric sense of freedom from the arrogant fanaticism that characterises much of the brains own discourse. But they are also a result of the brains lost confidence in its own rigour. For sadly, their euphory is coupled with a complete forgetfulness and outright contempt for the brains own discourse. EP and cognitive neuroscience look at the brain in terms of those vulgar concepts that the brain, precisely, tried to take a distance to. They try to account for the brain in terms of food, protection and reproduction. They try to understand the brain in terms of what can be said about the brain and ignore what this brain itself has said and says. It is as if someone wanted to understand the significance of Einstein by putting him into an fMRI device and scan his brains and put forth hypotheses about how his brain functions as a device for reproducing genes, without caring to listen what Einstein himself has to say.

What does the brain say? To our best knowledge, the brain knew already thousands of years ago that it was essential for thinking. But it also knew something that today's scientists have a hard time making sense of, namely that it is some kind of locus for a whole that is not identical with the brain. The brain realised long ago that it cannot play the flute. The brain understood - for natural selection had created a truly astonishing thinking device - that it can live only by expressing itself through that whole that it is a part of; not by narcissistically observing itself. We get nowhere with the pianist who only scans her "fantastic brain" and photographs her "magnificent hands". We know the brain from what it performs. What is that? To name some things that are easy to point to: logic, mathematics, technology, science, religion, art, philosophy and the highest achievement (here I agree with Antonio Damasio but nothing in his results show or can show this, see Damasio 1999): conscience. The brain realised that it is actually an I and that the most precious thing there is, is a relationship to another I - or to many particular I:s. There has always been a temptation to think that belonging to "us" is the most precious thing, but the corruptness of this idea has also been pointed out time and again. In this paper I have tried to point to a certain aspect of the difficulties we have with this most precious I-you relationship and the way we tend to go collective when facing these difficulties. In trying to sort out this kind of difficulties within the "brains own discourse".
EP and neuroscience are of no help. However, if something goes wrong with the brain or if something is bad for the brain, they can both come up with solutions that are of decisive importance. The pianist is infinitely thankful to the surgeon if the surgeon makes her injured hands work perfectly again. But when the surgeon starts to think that music should be understood in terms of surgery one wonders, after the initial laughter, what it is that she is hearing.

References:


