The paper is a preliminary draft; it is an effort to flesh out a paper I read at Manchester University, 2010.

**Repression and formal meaning**

The idea that reasoning is essential for moral understanding has been both affirmed and contested for ages. During the last decades the polarity between cognitivists and emotivists seems however to have diminished. This may be due to a generally increased interest in emotions and to the effects that evolutionary psychology and neuroscience have had on moral philosophy. In these disciplines the importance of both reasoning and emotion is often emphasised.

Fruitful as this loosening up of oppositions may be in many ways, I am concerned by the fact that the moral role of moral reasoning has not been elucidated from a sufficiently broad perspective. Moral reasoning has mostly been understood in epistemological terms and been related to moral truth, moral fact and moral theory. What the *moral* role of moral reasoning is has not been much discussed. This is what I try to do. It will turn out that moral reasoning is connected to a deep moral problem that involves that we avoid or, rather, repress our conscience.

There is a characteristic problem with revealing what happens here: Our moral difficulties manifest themselves in our *use of language*. If we have a difficulty with acknowledging something, then this avoidance does not manifest itself only negatively as a tendency to avoid certain words and descriptions but also positively. This means that out of our avoidance we create certain uses of words. These uses could be said to manifest a grammar of repression. If we look back 100 years, we see clearly how words such as honour, decency and respectability, in the very way they were used,
concealed certain difficulties concerning sexuality. Part of the grammar of these words was, and still is, unconsciously determined by hiding certain aspects of meaning. The hiding function of contemporarily fashionable concepts is more difficult to see. How then can one uncover this hiding function? It seems to me that it shows itself in an emphasis on meaning that, on closer scrutiny, is not at all an instance of moral meaning but, rather, a repressive formalism. To put it slightly less abstractly: All efforts to prove the moral importance of, for instance, "honour" presuppose both the idea of a "respectful" distance between people and instances of meaning that turn out to be formal (for instance the talk about how respect for the other "matters", is "important", is "valuable", etc.). In fact, "honour" does not have any moral meaning; it does not express a concern for the other. This lack is concealed behind a grammar where formal meanings create an illusion of moral meaning. In this formalising movement a given concept takes on a distinct function that under the normative weight created by common fear becomes metaphysical; the concept is taken to express a meaning that is "absolute", "necessary", "obligatory", "sui generis", etc. (The distinctness of the function being the other side of the urgency of the unconscious avoidance. An empty concept can in other words have a distinct meaning in the sense that it can be used in a specific way.) Formal moral concepts thus have use and meaning in the sense that they hide certain instances of moral meaning and create an illusion of moral meanings that are actually only repressions of moral meaning.

A short characterisation of “formal” might be in place. “Formalisation” in my sense is one of many forms depersonalisation. It is an unconscious effort to distance oneself from moral issues and instead view them from a general perspective. Here the importance of “generality”
obviously lies in the depersonalised meaning that it sustains. The notorious phrase “I was only following orders” is an example. “Following orders” has a logic that is detached from a personal moral outlook.

When I speak about formalisation I thus think of a concept unconsciously used to cover over a personal, moral issue with an outward (general, cultural, logical, empirical) characterisation. (I will say less about the corresponding particularising tendency, where something is taken to be irreducibly personal, i.e., subjective.) In this paper I will try to show how the formalising steps enter the picture and replace description with arguing. What I say will, as far as I can see, be in some sense relevant to all sorts of ideas about moral reasoning, including non-cognitivism.

My aim is, in part, to show how the concepts of moral principle and moral reasoning (including moral arguments) together with their universalising and particularising tendency are internally connected to depersonalisation. These concepts (together with others) form a logic where, as I try to show, moral dilemmas inevitably arise as a consequence of the concepts of moral principle and moral reasoning. If this is right, then the debate about moral dilemmas is confused.

Another way of putting what I do would be to say that I try to show how depersonalisation involves a formalisation of moral understanding. This way of putting it will reveal how we use moral reasoning in order to avoid, in the sense of repress, moral understanding. Do I then claim that moral reasoning is, in all of its forms, a repression of moral understanding? I hope this question will seem less pressing at the end of this paper.

I will speak about “formal” meaning when a moral word is used in a way which is detached from a personal relationship between two persons. For instance, “Stealing is wrong!” is
formal in that it appeals to a principle. The speaker does not try to reach the other and make her see what she is doing. Instead, the speaker condemns the action as belonging to a certain category of forbidden actions. The speaker is not addressing the agent trying to make her understand her acting as she would if she said for instance: “What are you doing! How can you...”

One could say that I want to show the further connections of the ordinary habit of addressing persons formally when politeness, ritual or rank demands it. (In many languages the second person plural has a formal meaning, namely when it is used by two persons who do not know each other or who differ in respectability, esteem or rank.)

I will show how depersonalisation works by discussing Ingmar Bergman's book *Private Confessions* (Bergman 1996). I will, however, not stick to the story but alter it in different ways in order to bring out different moral possibilities. The story depicts a marital problem: Anna is the daughter of a high-bourgeois family. She is married to the priest Henrik who is psychically unstable. Within a couple of years the marriage turns into a hell for Anna. She then falls in love with Tomas and establishes a secret relationship to him. A central theme in the story is the importance of telling the truth. Since Anna has a secret relationship to another man she both lies and is unfaithful to Henrik, i.e.; that is the way Bergman puts it and this certainly is how people mostly understand this kind of issues. Anna completely acknowledges the importance of telling the truth but she is also quite certain that if she would tell Henrik about her relationship "all hell breaks loose" (p. 29). More importantly she is convinced that the truth would crush Henrik.
Anna's uncle Jacob, also a man of the church, advises her to tell the truth: "the truth is the only possibility" (ibid.). Anna, however, cannot ignore her conviction that Henrik will collapse if he hears the truth. I will now focus on this problematic and ignore other motives that Anna might have (such as being worried about how to take care of her children). A case where this would be the only worry for a person in Anna's position is completely thinkable.

Anna completely acknowledges the weight of telling the truth to Henrik. That even appears to be the main reason for her anguish. Unlike Jacob, however, she feels that she cannot simply leave the problem about Henrik's mental health into the hands of God. This being the case she runs into what in philosophical terms is a typical moral dilemma. She feels that she must tell the truth but she also feels that she must take Henrik's well being into serious consideration. Since it is the truth that would in all likelihood crush Henrik, the two moral oughts are mutually exclusive.

It is important to note that when two possibilities contradict each other this means that they are not taken merely as possibilities but as principles. If Anna would think that it is often important to tell the truth and often important to consider the well being of others, then no contradiction would arise for then she could state that she very obviously is in a situation where one of the possibilities must, for the sake of goodness, be overruled. This, however, is not how Anna conceives of her situation.

Principles can contradict precisely because they are rigorous and admit of no exceptions. It is important to see what this rigour is about. To view a statement as a principle involves that one takes it to be systematically valid. In case of "moral principle" there is the additional aspect that it is felt to be morally necessary: it “ought” to be valid. Now it becomes
clear how the concepts of *argument* and *formality* are part of the picture. For if principles are essential then it is of course equally essential to investigate the relations between different principles. In some cases, then, it appears that moral principles will unavoidably run into contradiction (the arguments of those philosophers who dispute this is irrelevant for my point). Investigating relations between principles is a formal, logical enterprise and it has largely dominated moral philosophy. As will become clear, this formalising tendency of moral philosophy is inseparable from actual moral practices.

Conceiving something as a moral dilemma implies that the issue is formalised and that a host of formal concepts are invoked. This is of course not surprising for to speak about principles is to speak about the systematic aspects of a statement.¹ The same can be said about concepts such as duty, obligation and ought. Indeed, they are words used to articulate moral principles. (The kind of distinctions that have been made in the process of trying to resolve moral dilemmas do not change my point.)

In this connection I want to point out that both Mounce and Phillips (19xx) and Winch (1972) describe moral dilemmas in the way accounted for above the difference being only that the former use the notion of conflict between principles while Winch speaks about a conflict between oughts (Mounce & Phillips 19xx p. xx, Winch 1972 p. 158 - 59.) It is important to note that the way these writers speak about moral dilemmas and principles differ from what might be called the standard view. Mounce, Phillips and Winch do not think that a moral dilemma is simply a logical contradiction between generally valid statements but that it involves a personal outlook. A moral principle expresses a personal moral understanding; it is not a logical claim valid for everyone regardless of what they

¹ Someone might here say that I confuse the moral and the logical use of "principle". My point, however, is that the moral use harbours an unacknowledged formality.
think. This makes their view more closely related to the case I am discussing. Bergman’s book could indeed be an illustration of what Mounce, Phillips and Winch say. But as I will try to show they all miss the crucial fact of repression.

*Impersonality and Formality*

Now let me lay out a description of the sense in which Anna performs an unconscious depersonalisation. That she performs a depersonalisation is in a way quite obvious, for elaborating formal relationships is by definition impersonal in the sense that the elaborations are supposed to be valid to anyone. Someone might admit also that the depersonalisation is unconscious in the sense that Anna probably is not aware of it. But what, it may be asked, does it mean to say that the depersonalisation is unconscious in the sense of being repressed/repressing? I will come to that by and by.

Anna strongly feels that she is stuck in an irresolvable problem. This feeling is internally connected to the fact that two possibilities that she could think of doing seem to announce themselves quite spontaneously. However, these possibilities run into contradiction. She reflects at the possibilities and weighs their implications but finds no way out: "Whatever one does something terrible happens." For reasons I will come back to I want to emphasise the fact that the possibilities in question seemed to announce themselves quite spontaneously. It may therefore appear as they were expressions of her personal moral outlook. Indeed the idea of moral dilemmas that for instance Winch is discussing builds on this assumption.

Part of what Anna seems to be finding out has often been thought of in terms of the notion of "human condition". This may seem to be a fine and deep insight but it has its
drawbacks. From having been Anna who is married to Henrik and who has had a sexual relationship to another man, she has become just a universal anyone; an instance of "human being": "Whatever one does something terrible happens." This use of language is not haphazard to the issue at hand. Even if Anna could of course have said "Whatever I do…", the formalisation that she performs involves that she looks at the problem in an impersonal way. Her using the formulation "Whatever one does…” reflects, even if not important as such, her sensitivity to this fact.

The formality of the concepts contradiction, principle, argument, etc., is transferred into Anna's use of the statement "Whatever one does…” for there is nothing personal about using this sentence in the context we are dealing with. The personal in the matter lies wholly in Anna's moral despair but in the above setting there is nothing much to say about it. In Winch's account one can in fact find the same structure. Winch says that a person who is in the same situation as the one Winch discusses - namely captain Vere in Melville's short story Billy Budd, Foretopman - and who considers the same arguments as captain Vere did, might end up choosing the option that Vere rejected. Winch thinks that this points to a kind of personal moral weighing that cannot be expressed in the terms of moral reasoning. (Winch 1972, pp. 168 - 69.)

Pointing to an irreducibly personal aspect of morals certainly has some merit to it, but to do it the way Winch does invites the classical subject-object dichotomy in a very unfortunate way. Post-Wittgensteinian moral philosophy has, generally speaking, emphasised the personal character of moral judgement, contrasted it with the impersonal character of formal reasoning and reminded about the importance of the engagement and despair that goes with moral problems. But since they have usually accepted the concept of moral
reasoning together with its formal structure and connected concepts (such as moral dilemma), the subject-object dichotomy re-appears in their account.

We see how Anna's depersonalisation and escape from a personal engagement with Henrik produces a split into, on one hand, a universal and formal aspect and, on the other hand, a personal and unspeakable aspect. These aspects do in a sense form an opposition but the aspects are still part of the same perspective. Things can oppose each other only as long as they take their departure from the same conceptual framework. The opposition between the universal and the particular is in other words internally related to "moral dilemma" and, further, to "principle", "argument", "formalisation", etc. The important thing is to try to view morals in a way where this network of interrelated concepts loose their hold.

**What is left out**

Bergman conceives of Anna's situation in terms of telling the truth and considering the other's well-being. Even if this constellation could be characterised as typically philosophical I think that it captures very well also everyday moral concerns. In fact, what I think that Bergman has left out from his description is also typically left out in everyday moral reasoning. If I am right, this shows why a literary description that is true to life nevertheless can omit important issues. In short: moral problems are equally difficult to the "ordinary person", the novelist and the philosopher.

What then is left out? Let me approach the issue by and by. We could here ask: Why is it so important to tell the truth? We cannot say that it is quite generally and self-evidently important to always tell the truth. There is no concept of truth that fits this abstract demand. Someone might now want to
narrow the issue by saying that only moral truth is something that must always be told. But my question is precisely: why do some truths acquire a moral character? Obviously it is not simply their status of being true. And given the task I have set myself in this paper I cannot accept the suggestion that it simply belongs to our fundamental moral principles that the truth must always be told.

"Telling the truth" could be characterised as giving a correct account where nothing is left out or added. But why else would one distort an account if not to gain some advantage or avoid some harm, embarrassment, accusation, etc.? Moral truth, thus, differs markedly from the kind of truth that is the result of an inquiry. When truth in the moral sense becomes important, it signals that doubt has announced itself. When a person asks someone else: "Are you sure that that is the way it happened?" and similar things, then she doubts the truth of an account. The point is that issues about telling the truth arise against the background of doubt.

What is the background to Anna's - and Bergman's - concern with telling the truth? Who has doubted Anna and in what respect? No one has. Why then is Anna preoccupied by telling the truth - and why does Jacob share this preoccupation? For could it not be the case that there were many truths, even important ones, that Anna forgot to tell to Henrik, yet without being much concerned about that fact? What I try to point at is that Anna simply felt a need to talk to Henrik and that it is not self-evident why she interprets this need as a duty to speak the truth. Since Henrik had not doubted the truth of anything she had said, this need to talk cannot be understood as an urge aroused by an assumed need to tell the truth.

Anna's need to talk to Henrik issues, I think, from her feelings for him - no matter how little she otherwise wanted to
engage with him. But this need is not a need to tell the truth to him. As noted Henrik had not doubted anything. Or was it perhaps Anna herself who doubted something about herself? That seems to be to the point but again this is not an issue about telling the truth, for presumably she herself knew what she had said and done. And if she would have been uncertain, she could have tried to remember these things. And if she simply would have forgotten something, then surely that would not have aroused the urgent feeling of telling the truth.

In this connection it is perhaps illuminating to point out that Anna's difficulty of telling the truth was not a difficulty about remembering something correctly. She perfectly well knew what it was that she was supposed to tell, namely that she had a sexual relationship to Tomas. The problem was not to find the truth but telling it. What kind of truths are there that are well known but hard to tell? Well, whatever they are the difficulty is not about knowing the truth. We have a rather interesting tension here: When it comes to one of the two options that are supposed to create her moral dilemma, Anna knows the truth but has difficulties with telling it. When it comes to the dilemma as a whole things are reversed. Here Anna, according to the dilemma thesis, does not know what is the right thing to do but, it is assumed, if she knew it she would do it.

It is of certain interest to note that the first kind of difficulty is independent of the second. That is, even if Henrik would be psychically strong and in a good mood it would be as difficult as ever for Anna to tell the truth. In fact one can very easily imagine how Anna in this kind of situation would change her self-deceptive argument telling herself for instance that she has no "right" to ruin Henrik's happy life "just because" she wants to relieve her own guilt. Even if some people would defend this possibility too, I will draw my line of moral
sensibility here and go along only with those who agree that this kind of reasoning is morally corrupt.

In the above case we would say that the person is deluding herself by pretending to be considerate. "Pretending to be considerate" cannot be described as a form of dishonesty for Anna tells other persons the same thing as she tells herself. In this sense she honestly despairs at the thought of making Henrik unhappy. Still her concern is repressed in that it is secretly motivated by the truth that "cannot" be told. (Fingarette *) In fact, the strong feeling of having to tell the truth to Henrik is a repression of the conscientious call to openness with Henrik. All moral concern issues from his openness. That we "reach out" to other human beings can be pointed to in different ways: human beings have a "moral effect" on each other, they cannot simply ignore each other, etc. This fact does not of course prevent human beings from being endlessly cruel to each other, but this cruelty is not a result of indifference but of repressing the inerasable conscientious relationship in which human beings stand to each other.

Any kind of concern between Anna and Henrik starts from their desire to reach each other. If there would be no such desire, there would be no concern between them; only formal claims to recognition. This is the scenario where the mind of the other is doubted and the other is instead interpreted as an entity that has the right to make such and such claims. (In an important sense there is no difference between doubting that the other has a mind and denying it. The mother who really is sceptical about the baby’s having a mind will not reach the baby any better than the one who denies its having a mind - presupposing that these attitudes are conceivable at all.) If this scenario would be correct then Anna's conception of her options would indeed be correct too. The mindless Henrik is
entitled both to know facts that are relevant to him and to be treated with consideration and Anna has the corresponding obligations. Without doubt these obligations run into conflict. But in fact Henrik is not, not even potentially, mindless and this makes all the difference.

Anna’s problem can be conceived of only as a rejection of the kind of concern and openness that she already stands in with Henrik. “But how can one reject something that is already the case?” Well, in the same way as one can reject the fact that one is already in the same room as a certain, troubling, other person and still pretend that she is not there. All the movements and involvements that one makes are related to the presence of that person and to the kind of importance that she inescapably has - and yet "she is not there" (“Oh! Was she there? I didn’t notice.”)

Anna rejects what is already there and all the problems she makes up are symptoms of this rejection. The kind of concern she feels for Henrik is part of the repressing/repressed conception. Her concern is repressing in the sense that, without her wanting to acknowledge it, it has the function of preventing her from seeing how things are. Her concern is repressed in the sense that the character of her consideration is determined by its repressing function. She will automatically and rigorously reject all forms of concern that threaten to reveal the biased character of the kind of concern she cherishes.

Suppose Anna would tell Henrik about her affair. After the first chock he might come to understand how he had contributed to the situation. In this case he might want to repair their relationship, start to talk about it, caress Anna, want to make love to her, etc. It is this “risk” that Anna wants to avoid at any cost. It also gives meaning to and structures her moral dilemma. At the same time Anna has a feeling of having
to be open with Henrik. The feeling could be called her
conscience.

Anna has a bad conscience because of what she is and is
not to Henrik – not because she fails to account for this or that
truth about herself. Anna’s focus on the issue of telling the
truth is a repression of conscience. How? Anna cannot stand
the idea of reconciliation with Henrik. This could be expressed
by saying the she does not want to ask for forgiveness for
forgiveness includes reconciliation; it expresses a desire to re-
open the openness that one has oneself jeopardised.

Wanting to ask for forgiveness means that one desires the
person one has wronged, that one looks up the person and
hopes that the relationship can be repaired. Forgiveness is an
aspect of having a conscience. But as we all know, conscience
can be overruled. We also know that it cannot be simply
erased. Thus, if we do not ask for forgiveness we feel guilt.

Another fact that is of highest interest to our case is that
asking for forgiveness is a very hard thing to do. Even small
children feel this difficulty. When one tells a child to ask for
forgiveness because it has been nasty to a friend, it is quite
possible that the child says with a sour tone of voice: "Well,
sorry then." Even a child can use language in a sophisticated
way when it tries to get around a difficulty: "Well…..then".
That this is so is no external or additional difficulty in our
present case but, rather, essential to it. The "ought" that Anna
chooses to reject happens to presuppose that she does
something that is very hard to do while the ought of
"consideration for Henrik" is so easy that anyone is ready to
choose it. This kind of asymmetry is common in so called
moral dilemmas. For the proponents of moral dilemmas they
should be much more disturbing than has usually been
acknowledged. From the point of view of conscience,
however, they are not as odd as they should be to those who take them seriously.

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Anna could neither get rid of her conscience nor follow it in forgiveness. Neither could she simply state that she does not want reconciliation with Henrik and that this is why she does not want to ask him of forgiveness. She does not want reconciliation but still she cannot simply state that fact. Why is that? Because her desire for reconciliation is a matter of conscience and so simply to reject it amounts to rejecting one’s conscience. Who is able – or even wants to be able – to get rid of her conscience? But let us take a look at what such a possibility would look like. We can know it because we often pretend that there is no such thing as conscience, indeed; this is what Anna does. Let us now take a look at what it would look like if the way Anna states her problem would not be pretence.

In this case Anna would have concluded that Henrik might be entitled to know about her affair because it is relevant knowledge to him. This argument would (for why, in this case, would it not?) be overtrumped by the argument that her prospects would be austere if she told the truth. She might also refer to the probable fact that Henrik might be upset by hearing the truth. The case is thus easily settled. If Anna lacked conscience it would be unintelligible why she would still feel that she should tell the truth. Has she not just stated that she does not want to ask for forgiveness, that Henrik ought to know about her affair but that she does not want to suffer the consequences of this? On top of that, hearing the truth might disrupt Henrik. These are all things that Anna might actually think. Why would it be horrifying and callous to state the issue on these quite actual terms? Why would it be
like an ultra-psychopathic parody to "solve" the problem in the above way and then forget about it? It is because this way of thinking catches only one aspect of Anna's moral reflection. There is another, repressed, aspect, the one of conscience. This aspect makes all the difference but it is difficult to bring out. But let us continue asking questions.

Why does the difference between Bergman’s Anna and the Anna of the above paragraph appear so huge? “Because one cannot simply ignore the moral principle of ‘telling the truth’.” But the Anna of the preceding paragraph did not ignore it. She only thought it was overruled by another principle. Why would that kind of moral reasoning be so wrong? Why is it so much of a “moral necessity” to think that we have a moral dilemma that a person who takes the terms in which it is couched seriously and solves the problem, appears as an ultra-psychopath? Well, it is because at issue is actually not at all the necessity of the two conflicting oughts but, in a repressed way, the necessity of conscience. The actual but repressed problem looks like this: “I feel that I should ask for forgiveness, love him and speak with him but I cannot. I do not want to love him anymore, and I cannot anymore discuss the issue in the spirit of love. It feels so bad not to want to love him.”

In fact, it feels so bad that when we do not want to love we refuse to see that this is the case and re-describe the problem the way Anna did. (In cases where a person does say to another person “I do not love you anymore” repression will re-appear in another way, but I cannot go into that here.) As a consequence of the re-description the bad feeling is, apparently, no longer about our rejection of love but instead about facing a moral dilemma. For reasons that must be pretty obvious by now, this does not feel at all as bad as knowingly reject love – whatever that means. However, since the content
of the re-description is a fruit of an escape from conscience, to take it at face value would amount to taking consciencelessness seriously. The formalising discourse where the issue appears as a moral dilemma is in other words without conscience. We do have a sense for this upsetting fact. Even if conscience is rarely discussed, the possibility of ignoring one’s conscience still shocks people. (Psychopaths are much discussed today and they are more or less defined, wrongly in my view, as being “without conscience”, to hint at Robert Hare’s book (1999). However, the growing interest in psychopathy is not coupled with any ongoing discussions of conscience.) Thus, simply ignoring conscience is not thinkable. (It is not possible either but I will not discuss this side of the matter.) Our urge to avoid the problem of love and our reluctance to completely desert conscience leads us to focus on the dilemma. There are in fact two opposing things here but it would be unthinkable to express the moral problem in the actual terms.

If one focuses on the dilemma one will be connected to conscience because guilt is unavoidable in a dilemma: whatever one does, someone will be hurt. Even if guilt is a repression of conscience it is at the same time a connection to conscience. But if the discursive, reasoning part of the dilemma would be taken seriously, nothing would prevent the conclusion that, having considered the principles and arguments, one or the other of the conflicting options can be overruled. Consequently, there is no reason to feel guilt. If we would arrive at this conclusion, we would be like psychopaths (the way they are usually depicted).

Thus, the idea of the dilemma itself - of something insolvable - is essential to repression. The reasoning is just a consequence of the dilemma while the formality is a form of depersonalisation and depersonalisation a way of keeping the
“necessity” of the dilemma dissociated from conscience with its I-you perspective.

We now see why Anna is banging her head in the wall by coming back to the need to tell the truth. She does not want to be in the openness of love with Henrik but neither does she want (nor is she able) to simply ignore him and do away with her conscience. The urgency of having a conscience cannot be accounted for by characterising it as a concern for other person's feelings. Would it be to "consider Henrik's feelings" if Anna would crash her husband with the truth? And why should she risk being thrown out of the house with her children just to consider Henrik’s feelings? And could one not say that Anna’s keeping quiet about her affair is a result of estimating both Henrik’s and her own feelings and finding that on the whole it is better to be quiet. But if the issue would be only about considering feelings, then Anna could settle for this option and reach the “no reason to feel guilt” conclusion – which is not acceptable.

My description turns around the fact that "telling the truth" is not the same as asking for forgiveness. In the present case, telling the truth is a repression of forgiveness (but of course forgiveness can be repressed in other ways to – such as by apologising). This shows itself also in the kind of reasoning that is connected to these two possibilities respectively. To have a bad conscience involves that one recognises one's conscience and wants to ask for forgiveness. One wants to meet the person and put things aright. One recognises that what is at stake is who "I" am for myself and at the same time for the other and what, similarly, the other is for herself and for me.

Repressing conscience involves that the pang of conscience is interpreted as guilt. Guilt is the understanding where one recognises having done something wrong but without wanting
to put things aright, i.e.: one, in this sense, *avoids* the other. The depersonalised character of guilt could be pointed at by noting that in the spirit of guilt one makes an apology where one should have asked for forgiveness. Apologising is formal and therefore, as Austin rightly claims, an apology is performed if one says “I’m sorry that...” (ref *). But since irony and arrogance can never be excluded, Derrida’s critical qualification is to the point. (I have elsewhere dealt more in detail with the difference between bad conscience and guilt, see xx*.)

Guilt is what lies behind the depersonalising reasoning that I have described above. However, guilt does not necessarily lead to moral reasoning. Guilt can also be adopted (actually and philosophically) as an existential attitude the way Heidegger and (I have to say without discussion) Freud do. (ref.*) On these terms guilt is seen as one of the fundamental features of human existence. This, however, is not my present topic so I will leave it. (I have criticised this aspect of guilt in **.*) In guilt you withdraw yourself from the other; you avoid her. This withdrawal occurs among other things by way of moral reasoning. This comes out very clearly in Anna’s case, for the very urgency of her moral reasoning is connected to her feeling of guilt.

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My aim has been to show that moral reasoning starts off when we do not want to hearken to our conscience. I have been showing how this happens by using an example where a wife has been unfaithful without wanting reconciliation with her husband. But, it might be asked, could not a wife who wants reconciliation with her husband use moral reasoning when reaching for that reconciliation? That would show that my account is biased. - Let us see how the wife who wants
reconciliation would reason. To begin with we will assume that the husband is not psychically unstable, so his mental health is not an issue.

This woman, let us call her Lilith, has had an affair with another man but she wants, in some sense of “want”, to go back to her husband. How does she reason morally? Moreover, what does she reason about? Could she reach the conclusion that she does not have to tell her husband anything about her affair in order to be close with him? She might think like this: “I want to be with my husband. I must in other words approach him. But wait! Do I then have to tell him about my affair? No. That is not a good idea. I’ll just go back to him and show him my love.” What would this involve?

What is the problem with Lilith’s reasoning above? It is precisely that she views her relationship to her husband and what she is ready to talk with him as being externally related. In fact, and quite independent of how happy Lilith and her husband might appear, she is even further removed from love than is Anna. Anna repressed and distorted the meaning of, as it were, talking and loving but she did not repress their internal connection. This shows itself in her preoccupation with truth. She repressed the possibility of forgiveness but she did not deny the internal relationship between her love for Henrik and her readiness to talk to him. This is why she, as opposed to Lilith, will attach much importance to moral reasoning.

It is indeed in order to say that Anna’s engagement in moral reasoning is a sign of her acknowledging conscience. But she acknowledges it only in the sense that she is prepared to take on guilt. The case of Lilith high-lightens the sense in which Anna’s response is connected to her conscience though it does not follow that Lilith’s response is devoid of that connection. It would, however, be right to say that Lilith’s way of ignoring the problem is connected to a morally
troublesome narcissistic tendency for she does not connect her own understanding to her husband’s understanding. In her view her affair existed only in her mind as long as her husband did not know about it. Still, one cannot say that she simply is not aware of the importance of being open with her husband.

The kind of contrast we perceive between the cases of Anna and Lilith easily tempts us – because we have the temptation – to think of Anna’s case as being “paradigmatically moral”. But as I have tried to show, a lot of repression is going in her case.

The kind of moral reasoning that Lilith is engaged in does not have, within itself, any obvious tension between following conscience and repressing it but one can perhaps say that the fact that she considers the situation at all is a sign of that tension, though in a more repressed form. But let us now consider still one kind of case; a case where the wife, let us call her Eve, after an affair wants to go back to her husband. She hearkens to her conscience and so wants to ask her husband for forgiveness. Does she perform something that can be called moral reasoning? If so, what would she be reasoning about? She is going to ask for forgiveness. That is that. What is her problem? Is it not a basic feature of reasoning that it addresses a problem? And if we attach importance to the reasoning, we assume that the problem is non-trivial. But Eve has no problem and no need for reasoning.

If it is suggested that Eve is considering for instance whether she should talk to her husband about the matter at his work-place; an open plan office, or in privacy at home, this can hardly count as a problem at all. Anyway, it surely does not merit the name moral reasoning.

It appears as if the only instance where moral reasoning has a strong sense is when the tension between acknowledging and repressing conscience is at its highest. In short: cases like the
one of Anna. If conscience is more severely repressed we get cases like Lilith’s and if it is repressed less we approach Eve’s situation. And does it not stand to reason that moral reasoning is most needed when the problem is most strongly felt?

How would it change the cases if we would assume that the husband is, like Henrik, on the verge of a psychic collapse and probably has serious difficulties with forgiving? We must, first of all, realise that the “psychic instability” is not a problem that is isolated from the moral problems we are discussing. This is not only because psychic problems are also moral problems but because any problem that can be brought to bear on moral problems is thereby part of the problem. In Lilith’s case things would not change in a way relevant to our topic, but what about the case of Eve?

Insofar as Peter’s psychic condition is relevant for Eve’s trouble, this means that it is itself an expression of, among other things, suspicion. This is why Eve has a difficulty with approaching him. The psychic disorder also involves that Peter is not really in touch with Eve; he has closed himself off from her and this of course also means that he closes himself off from love. What could be said about Peter could also be said about Henrik, namely that his corruption lies in the fact that he does not care about how Anna (respectively Eve) feels as long as he "has" her. What would upset him is not lovelessness, that is in fact what he himself has moved towards, but having lost the culturally determined sense of "having" his wife.

One could say that Eve’s difficulty is to make Peter see her and not the prestigious and corrupt aspect of who is “having” her; a difficulty that is connected to the fact that he has already distanced himself from her. She has had the same difficulty with him already before her affair, which of course does not make things easier. Whatever she would do, the kind of moral reasoning that we had in Anna’s case simply could not
announce itself for her. This is because she is not at all uncertain about what she should morally speaking do. It is only that since her relationship to Peter is already problematic, she is afraid that Peter would not accept her asking for forgiveness but go completely mad instead. And, importantly, the problems between her and Peter already involve that a lot of things that should be said are not said. The affair changes nothing in this regard.

In the case of Eve there is no point with saying that she “should” ask for forgiveness. She longs for the possibility of getting closer to Peter and talk to him in openness. This also involves that she is trying to find ways of helping Peter open himself up. Whatever the further moves of Eve might be, we should note that she sees things as they are and makes her best to improve the situation. But the reflection needed here is not what is usually called moral reasoning. And whatever it is called it does not have any of the characteristics that moral reasoning has. (I have not discussed cases where it is morally sound to reason about the conveniences and inconveniences of a course of action. I cannot go into my reasons for this omission but, shortly put, it is because such cases are either practical in a non-moral sense, judicial or political. Contrary to what utilitarians assume, the moral meaning of such cases can be made sense of only from the kind of moral perspective I am elaborating here.)

Conclusion

The direct aim of this paper was to point out the problematic role that moral reasoning has in our moral lives and, as a consequence, in moral philosophy. This was done by showing in what way moral reasoning is a repression of conscience. In this way I wanted to elucidate also the moral
role of repression. However, given the central role that moral reasoning has in moral philosophy, I feel that it is important to shortly discuss the further ramifications of this issue. Most obviously, one could mention that the idea of moral dilemmas comes out quite differently. The repressed motivation behind the reasoning is precisely to create a dilemma. The idea of a moral dilemma is in other words itself morally problematic.

Further, the perennial dichotomies between deontology and utilitarianism and emotivism and cognitivism issue from not realising the crucial role that conscience and repressing it have for understanding morals. Moral reasoning, like any reasoning, can get off the ground only when understanding already is present. Otherwise we would have nothing either to reason with or reason about. Moreover, reasoning is grammatically a way of addressing problems. This means that we can speak of moral reasoning only when we are in moral trouble. That a problem is moral means among other things that I am personally involved in it. My “having” it is part of the problem. This means that my way of dealing with the problem is part of the problem itself. “Moral reasoning” cannot in other words be a morally neutral method for solving problems.

What I have said does not support either side in the dichotomies mentioned above. The role that moral reasoning has for Anna cannot be captured by “moral reasoning” the way it is usually conceived of, namely as a rational activity. Nor can we say that it is some kind of combination of emotion and reason. Conscience is neither reason nor emotion. Eve’s response is neither emotional nor rational. Yet it certainly is not callous and irrational either. We do not have a good enough account of emotion and reason in order to express Eve’s understanding clearly and I think that in order to give
such an account we need to consider the concept of conscience more thoroughly than I can do in this paper.

Anna’s uses her reasoning to repress her conscience. Thus, no matter how rational such reasoning might seem to be it cannot be called rational in the sense that our reasoning in practical and logical circumstances can be called rational. In the latter cases the only role reasoning has is to solve problems. This is not the case with Anna.

Talking of emotions instead of reasoning does not help to clarify Anna’s case. Persons who are in Anna’s situation and who reason the way she does could conceivably be both seemingly cool and rational or obviously emotional. In both cases conscience is repressed. Abandoning a moral possibility can occur equally well under the spell of emotionality (sentimentality, affectivity) as under the spell of reasoning.

During the last decades there have been efforts to integrate reason and emotion. (For such efforts see Nichols 2002, *) But since our accounts of both concepts are flawed, integrating them cannot be helpful. We must reflect at the way we use reason and emotion to escape from conscience. I have focused on moral reasoning and the way it has taken shape under the pressure of our difficulty with conscience, more specifically with forgiveness. We saw that when we do hearken to our conscience we are not in any specifiable sense using our reason even if we at the same time certainly are not unreasonable. On the contrary, we see things as clearly as they can be seen, i.e.: we do not try to avoid anything but instead want to see them as they are.

Similarly, this seeing certainly is not determined by any particular emotion or by affectivity. By contrast, Anna’s reasoning was accompanied by strong affects of guilt and shame but these affects were just as repressed as the reasoning. Even if hearkening to one’s conscience does not
involve emotionality, it does involve the strongest thinkable engagement with the other. The importance of these observations is that we should not try to conceive of conscience from the point of view of reasoning and emotion, for in that case we will miss-describe it. The efforts to account for moral responses as a combination of affective and cognitive processes will distort our understanding of these responses, or more specifically: of conscience.

To disclose these distortions is all the more important since an erratic account of morals will not fail in a way that is obviously false to anyone. The different moral ideologies have evolved because they in different ways calm down our moral anguish. This goes also for empirical tests, which means: empirical tests in morals are not scientific in the usual sense of the word. For instance, the empirical tests that are used to assess psychopaths’ incapacity both to feel empathy and to reason morally show us nothing about the morally problematic character of moral reasoning and moral emotions. (See for instance Blair 1995 and Maibom 2005.) The tests only confirm the conceptual framework already adopted and can within this framework give a deceptive appearance of “empirical result” by not always confirming all expectations. (Such deviations only show that the conceptual framework has not been thoroughly investigated.)

Blair (1995) for instance discusses the fact that psychopaths tended to treat conventional transgressions in a similar way as they treated moral transgressions. This was according to him in contrast to the predictions (p. 20). He then goes on to note that this finding is after all not surprising and in explaining why this is so, he reveals that he had not paid attention to certain important conceptual aspects of psychopathy and authority (p. 23). Had he done that, he would
have realised that the tendency in question is quite in line with the psychopathic disorder.

Conscience cannot be understood either in terms of sympathy and empathy or in terms of moral reasoning. It must be studied on its own terms. The concept of repression will be central here, for when we act in evil ways we cannot simply ignore our conscience but must create means for covering it over. This covering over can be characterised as unconscious in the sense that it involves avoiding to be aware of conscience. Saying that moral reasoning is unconscious and repressed does not mean that there is a conscious reasoning that is contradicted by an unconscious one nor that the latter lurks in some corner of the psyche. Instead, it means that the conscious reasoning is motivated by and connected to thoughts and feelings that the subject does not want to acknowledge. Without considering this mechanism of avoidance we will not be able to describe what is involved in moral understanding and acting.

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