

Role-Relatedness: Thought, Feeling, and Ethical Demands

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- Abstract -

This thesis examines our relatedness to roles. Section one presents aspects of Christine Korsgaard's recent work as a loose theory of roles. To summarise: Roles are normatively structured forms that we have to identify with to render them part of ourselves. Identification doesn't require reflection about roles. We think about them if we are tempted to violate their norms. Finally, the fact that we have many roles generates an ethical demand to integrate them. The rest of section one argues that Korsgaard's conception of identification is not sufficient to account for the complexities of our relatedness to roles. Section two develops a richer account of role-relatedness by considering Erving Goffman's notion of "attachment" to a role. I argue that attachment is normative; that how we comport ourselves to a role is open to critique. Then I argue that this normativity is itself a constituent part of the role in question. It is internal to a role, and not accounted for by a general interpretation of a generic form of relatedness that might hold between a person and many roles. I also consider whether attachment has cognitive and affective aspects, and defend my view against alternatives. Section three considers reflective role-attachment. I argue, contra Korsgaard, that we think about roles in many contexts and, significantly, such thought can be problematic. Firstly, reflection can be self-defeating if it is a normative aspect of the role in question that one refrains from reflecting about it. Secondly, reflection on a role might reify it. Various kinds of reification are considered. They are ethically problematic because reification can precipitate alienation which, I argue, impedes on a flourishing life. The final section draws upon earlier conclusions to argue that Korsgaard is wrong to suggest we need to integrate our roles. Integration might generate alienation.

- Contents -

Abstract

Contents

Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE – Korsgaard & Practical Identity

1. Exegesis
2. Endorsement
3. Treating ‘as if’
4. Towards a New Account

SECTION TWO – Aspects of Attachment

1. Attachment
2. Attachment is Normative
3. The Structure of Attachment
4. Cognitive & Affective Attachment

SECTION THREE – Reflecting on Roles

1. Self-defeating Reflection
2. Reification
3. Alienation

SECTION FOUR – Ethical Demands

1. Integration

Bibliography

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INTRODUCTION

In reading this thesis you are likely to be my tutor, friend, examiner, or a member of my family. In the eyes of some theories, these terms denote roles. In this instance they hold of you. Several might hold at once. A role can be circumscribed, to a greater or lesser extent, by widely understood descriptions. These descriptions describe what you do, or how you think and feel. You can use them to render yourself intelligible to both yourself, and others.

The notion of a role is closely connected to matters of explanation. Because roles obtain of many people in society, and often across societies, they necessarily have a social aspect. They are thus a useful theoretical tool when studying human behaviour in general terms.¹ What is more, because roles are held by individuals, appealing to them links individual and social worlds; particular behaviour and institutional contexts. So there are two faces to roles: their social face with its connection to explanation and understanding, and their personal face, with its link to subjective intelligibility and practical rationality. Much relies on the relation between these two faces.

The first-personal face of roles is important. They bear upon what David Velleman terms our “self-conception”; that is to say: our “non-reflexive conception of [ourselves] as one of the world’s inhabitants” (2006; 4). In thinking about who we are, and appraising ourselves we will refer to ourselves with regard to the roles we have. Being a mother, or a teacher, for example, might have great personal significance, and thereby be a source of self-esteem.

Furthermore, because roles partly comprise our self-conceptions they have an experiential character. Roles organise the way we experience the world - they have what Sebastian Gardner calls a “phenomenological set” that is to say, they provide a person with “an experiential point of view on themselves qua one of their aspects” (1993; 63) and form “certain patterned individually constituted and repeatable ways in which the world may appear to a person” (28). Roles have subjective import; just as sociological appeals to role terms allow sociologists to carve society in terms of various repeatable kinds of being and behaviour, so a person can be carved, from the personal-perspective, in terms of their roles.

¹ Biddle; 1986

You have many roles. They inform your conception of yourself, and have a subtle phenomenological valence. Thinking about yourself as a son, or mother, or father, or teacher has a variety of complex resonances. If you are ashamed of your youthful behaviour, or embarrassed by your attempts to be a father to your child, then the point of view on yourself provided by these roles may be coloured with sadness or regret.

As yet, the metaphysical implications of regarding roles in this way are unexplained. However, it is important to see that roles cut across first and third-personal perspectives because this bears upon their ethical relevance. Roles can feature at the centre of conversations about how to live, especially when we have to think hard about how to balance the demands that our various roles place upon us. They inform our conception of what is valuable in our lives.

In returning to *your* roles, it is essential to note that the character of how you are related to them is complex. Perhaps you strongly identify with the role in question. (Do you?). Maybe you fulfil its responsibilities reluctantly, or out of obligation, and thereby resist being defined in terms of it. It's possible you are ambivalent, or indifferent, about it. You might not think about the role at all, or perhaps you can't bring yourself to think about it. Irrespective of your specific attitudes, it is clear that in nearly every domain of your life it is possible to inquire not only after the roles that concern you, but also after the character of your relatedness to them.

Your sense of self-esteem is importantly connected to the roles you cultivate, or aspire after, because your self-conception, to which esteem refers, is comprised from roles. Similarly, in darker times, resistance to your roles may lead to anxiety, alienation, stress, or despair. An ailing life has these features at its centre; they inflect your relations with others as much as they do with yourself, especially because many roles necessarily presuppose relations to specific others. You can only be a parent, for example, insofar as you stand in relations to several other people, your child most obviously, and if you were to fail to identify with this way of being, or find yourself alienated from its demands, those people are liable to be deeply affected.

More prosaically, perhaps, an academic who is known to care little about her role in tutoring students (because she regards it as insignificant) will be criticised by them. The everyday possibility of this kind of censure points to the presence of various norms about how a tutor should feel and think about their role. We can imagine that this

academic is aware of this complex group of norms. Perhaps she remembers her time as a student and what she valued then, and asks herself whether she is living up to it now. If she is disposed to be sufficiently self-critical she might come to see that her behaviour falls short. Her realisation might occasion a sense of sadness, or guilt, and renewed attempts to improve her working relationship with her students. Or it might be accepted pragmatically and accompanied by a revision of what she believes about her role, as when she comes to think, “well actually teaching just isn’t as important as research”.

We can question which of these responses is apt and why.² The above example begins to show that in theorising about our relatedness to roles we will have to grapple with their normative aspects. Methodologically we see this is so when we study what Erving Goffman termed the “negatively eventful” i.e. latent social features that are only noticed when they are not present (1963; 7). We can then make claims about what is present, yet unnoticed, in everyday life. Examining contexts in which we appear to err illuminates the character of our role-relatedness. In grappling with this latent normativity, we shall see that some roles demand certain kinds of thought, feeling, and behaviour.

It can be asked, “How should we think and feel about ourselves when making explicit reference to roles?” “Can we go awry in comporting ourselves towards them?” “Is it of little consequence whether we ‘identify’ with what we are doing?” “Should concerns about alienation and our relatedness to a role feature within discussions about leading a flourishing life?” The possibility of posing these substantial questions supports the thought that roles are properly subject to philosophical inquiry.

Before providing an outline of my argument, observe that your relation to this text, via its author, is in virtue of a role. Your reasons for reading it are connected to the fact that a role holds of you that is connected, however indirectly, to the reading of philosophy theses. This thesis is about prosaic roles like these. As you read on you can relate my arguments to the role through which you have come to hold these pages and check my conclusions against the ordinary realities of acting, thinking, and feeling differently qua different roles.

In saying this I am committing myself to a particular approach to ethics - the domain to which I regard, somewhat loosely, this thesis as contributing. My approach is modest

² I use ‘our’ or ‘we’ in Annas’ “inclusive, invitational” sense of these terms (2011; p.3).

in scope. Jargon will be mobilised only if it deepens our understanding of the ordinary phenomena that comprise ethical life. Our understanding is deepened when we have a clearer grasp of these phenomena in their particularity, that is to say, of the details and complications that render everyday ethical concerns significant and difficult to face.

Ethical inquiry ought to be reasonably continuous with the forms of sustained reflection actual agents undergo. As a consequence, reading ethics can be a risky encounter in which one can come to see how one has been mistaken about certain ways of acting, or thinking, or that one's attitudes and beliefs towards have gone awry. Therefore there is scope for the writing of ethics to be personal, and my argument will occasionally be biographical. I aim to attend to the contours of actual reflection about roles and our attitudes towards them. Ordinary speech manifests these nuances. If it is plausible to think that roles are closely connected to, or constitutive of someone's character, as some theories argue, then their study can *only* be furthered through close attention to actual thought and behaviour.

This thesis centres on our relatedness to our roles; on the ways in which we comport ourselves towards roles we have, aspire to have, or have lost. I begin with critical discussion of the recent work of Christine Korsgaard (2009). I read aspects of her account of the constitution of the self, with its key notion of "practical identity", as a theory of roles. That is, as accounting for various traditional philosophical concerns, such as the metaphysics of the self, and the demands internal to an ethical life, in terms of roles. Her view is suggestive but unsuccessful. Its principal inadequacy, I shall argue, lies in her failure to consider the complexity of our relatedness to the roles we have and in her neglect of their personal valence.

In section one the salient features of Korsgaard's view are outlined and presented as a loose theory of roles. I then examine two facets of her thinking about how we relate to roles and render them part of us. The concept of identification is central to her view. Korsgaard explicates identification in terms of the endorsement and observation of a role's norms. I argue that not only is endorsement subject to two potential interpretations, but on the most plausible reading it is reflective and appears to be a matter of degree. Significantly, it follows that we can distinguish between someone's attitudes towards a role and their observation of its behavioural norms.

This conclusion is unsurprising. It reflects the idea that there are many ways we might be related to our roles, not all of them positive. Consequently, we see that placing

identification at the heart of an account of roles blinds Korsgaard's to various other forms of role-relatedness. It is important to avoid this blindness for two reasons. Firstly, it is more complete theoretically. Our account of roles can accommodate a greater number of everyday phenomena, other forms of relatedness to roles. Secondly, and more importantly, we will be better positioned to notice the ways in which our relatedness to roles can be an ethical matter that relates to the flourishing of a life. For example, alienation from oneself, qua a role, can have serious consequences.

The second half of my direct critique centres on a further layer to the notion of identification. Korsgaard implies that assuming a role might require someone to behave "as if" their role was source of inviolable norms. This view is problematic for a number of reasons that will be outlined, but it also seems to present us with a conception of roles that takes the theatrical sense of the term literally. Tackling this dimension of Korsgaard's account allows us to see that our relatedness to roles might require us to *resist* various patterns of reflection.

Discussing our relatedness to a role in *reflection* comprises much of section three. First, however, I establish that our relatedness to roles is more complex than Korsgaard realises. I develop my own account of this relatedness by building upon a distinction made by Goffman. He separates the attitudes someone takes towards a role from the ways in which they behave under its auspices. Section two is a study of the attitudinal side of this divide; an investigation of the character of our "attachment" to roles. I argue that this attachment is normative; that different roles require different forms of relatedness. This view forestalls Korsgaard's parsimonious approach by suggesting that an account of roles in which they only have a normative structure pertaining to behaviour is wrong. This is a key stage of my overall argument. I try to show that the ways in which we are attached to a role are also normatively structured. In a second substantial move, I argue that the norms that guide our comportment towards a role are themselves *constitutive* elements of the role itself. Thus we cannot circumscribe roles in terms of their behavioural norms alone. Part of what it is to recognise a role is to recognise how one ought to be attached to it.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our attachment to roles is how we should think and reflect about them. Addressing this requires individual attention to each specific role in turn (§2). However, section three consists of some general remarks about reflective dangers that arise when role-related thought conflicts with a role's normative structure. This reflection can go awry in two ways. Firstly, it can be self-undermining

when someone actively tries to inform their self-conception in a manner that precludes the success of such an attempt. Secondly, someone's reflection might mischaracterise their role. As I put it, someone can *reify* roles. Reification, I argue, is an error that can be made about certain roles. It arises when the external, third-personal perspective on roles is imported into the personal-perspective at the expense of the complexity and particularity of a role's phenomenological aspects; of what being a father, say, *is* for *you*.

Considering reification is significant because reification can precipitate alienation, an ethical pathology. Alienation intrudes upon the flourishing of a life when it affects the people who make our most valued roles possible. It presents us with an alternative manner of comporting ourselves to our roles; a way that can lead to the neglect of important particularities, and various patterns of exculpatory reasoning.

Attending to particularity is a general theme of this thesis. Korsgaard's theory of roles is overly parsimonious and neglects the complex ways roles feature in making people intelligible to themselves. This is both a theoretical mistake and a personal temptation; self-reflection might assume this character and reify our roles; something that may leave us alienated from what is significant.

Addressing this theoretical error shows us that thinking of roles solely in terms of identification will not get us far. Yet the variety of forms of relatedness, and the fact that reflection about roles is very particular, gesture towards a final question: How should we respond to the multiplicity of roles? In section four, drawing upon prior discussion of reification and alienation, I challenge Korsgaard's claim that having many roles generates an ethical demand to integrate them. Insofar as integration requires reflection on roles, it is potentially reificatory. Some roles are such that their normative structure precludes regarding them as the potential objects of what Korsgaard terms the "work" of integration at all.

I have made substantial claims about how roles should be understood. The rest of this thesis is an implicit argument for these assertions. My critique of alternative views and my positive arguments jointly evidence my claims about the nature of roles and their personal aspects. A specific instantiation of this concerns my analysis of reification. My view that roles constitute our self-conceptions and have particular phenomenological significance is supported if reifying a role is possible, and arises due to considering a role in its social aspect. Much of my thinking rests on the intersection between the

social and personal points of view; between what someone actually thinks and feels about herself qua a role and how others understand that role in society. That there is such an intersection, and that it must be theorised with care, will become apparent. It is not be possible to do justice to every complexity, but I aim to make some progress towards understanding roles through showing how our relationships to them can be fragile, fraught with uncertainties and pitfalls. They are related to broader ethical questions about personhood and a flourishing life.

In summary, then, the main theme of this thesis is that our relatedness to the roles we have is complex and demands a theoretical approach that reflects this. Thinking about our roles can be problematic in some cases, and this fact has implications that bear upon the ethical character of a life.

SECTION ONE

- Korsgaard's Account of *Practical Identity* -

I. Exegesis

The recent work of Christine Korsgaard (2009) gives an important place to roles. Discussing her view allows me to engage with questions raised in the introduction and will provide a reference point for further discussion. I begin by explaining some elements of her view before proceeding to question their plausibility.

Practical Identity

Korsgaard's work centres on the concept of a "practical identity". She describes this idea in two ways. The first is a "description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (2009; 20). The second is illustrated through her examples of practical identities: "roles and relationships, citizenship, memberships in ethnic or religious groups, causes, vocations, professions, and offices" (ibid). Of these examples she suggests that, "one might think of a particular practical identity, if a little artificially, as a set of principles, the dos and don'ts of being a teacher or a citizen, say" (21) of a practical identity as a "role with a point" (ibid).

There is an obvious difference between these approaches to practical identity. Valuing the fact one was "the tallest member of the class of 2006", for example, differs from valuing oneself as a student or parent. The latter are roles that have a broader social profile; a 'point'. However, individuals can also value themselves under particular descriptions that have no point. Korsgaard avoids these complications by stipulating what valuing a practical identity consists in; namely, "endorsing the reasons and obligations to which that way of identifying yourself gives rise" (24). This characterization forestalls alternative interpretations of what it is to value ourselves with regards to roles or other descriptions; for example, by the promotion or contemplation of ourselves under these descriptions as when someone thinks that the world is "just better" for having psychoanalysts, or godparents, or whatever, in it, and they value themselves for being an analyst, or godparent.

Korsgaard's definition of what valuing a practical identity is highlights two important aspects of her understanding of roles. Firstly, they are normatively structured. They contain obligations and expectations. As such, this narrows the scope of things that can be considered to be practical identities: they must contain norms that generate expectations in others. Secondly, roles are things to which we have to relate ourselves. On her account this occurs via the endorsement of their normative elements.

My argument focuses on roles and I shall use this term instead of talking of identities (licensed by Korsgaard's usage and by her examples³). It will become clear that we can turn to Korsgaard's account of practical identity as a way of thinking about roles because the former notion is understood to have a widely recognised social aspect, something that is associated with the notion of a role. In contrast, the notion of an identity is pre-theoretically looser than that of a role and is akin to Korsgaard's rejected interpretation of practical identity that would admit of 'identities' like "the tallest member of the class of 2006".

That roles have socially visible normative aspects follows from Korsgaard's claim that they are circumscribed in terms and defined by the obligations and expectations they place upon someone who assumes them. Assuming a teaching role, for example, will be to find certain actions open to you, and certain other actions unavailable, qua the role in question. This is related to Korsgaard's characterisation of roles as having a point; someone who assumes a role understands themselves qua the role in virtue of its particular purpose or activity. Because Korsgaard's account is meant to be inclusive, the idea of a role's point should be understood loosely to encompass the sense in which there might be a point to being a mother as well as being a teacher.

Korsgaard's inclusiveness means that she subsumes a variety of different roles under the single explanatory concept of practical identity. They range from professions like being a teacher, through to roles based on particular relationships, like being a friend or parent. Recognising this diversity is important because we will have to consider whether the specific details internal to Korsgaard's view of roles can accommodate this diversity without distortion.

It is unclear whether Korsgaard understands the obligations and expectations associated with roles to be *constitutive* of them. In an earlier work, she argues that

³ See the second quotation in the section about integration below.

“normativity is built right into the role” (1996; 101) which suggests (but does not entail) that she might think roles are constituted from these norms. The view that roles are constituted by norms is also supported by Korsgaard’s suggestion that roles can be contingently rendered “ours” (25). This idea implies that roles are structured before we assume them because we work to assume rather than create them. This view seems independently plausible. After all, the obligations of a role must be recognisable by others if they are to generate expectations.

Korsgaard’s eponymous thesis in *Self Constitution* is that practical identities constitute us as persons, and that endorsing them provides us with reasons for action in the first place. Detailed discussion of the latter cannot be pursued here.⁴ However, thinking that we construct ourselves, to some extent, from roles prompts the question: How do we relate to them, how do they become a part of us? Korsgaard answers this question parsimoniously; she appeals to one form of relatedness. This is surprising given her observation that although many of our practical identities are contingently chosen, many of them, like becoming an aunt, or citizen, are not appropriated in this way. This observation could support the conclusion that we need several accounts to accommodate the different ways in which roles become ours. Not only does Korsgaard’s account encompass various kinds of role but she also acknowledges different ways in which we might come to have a role. We thus have further reason to question whether a view like hers can account for this range of phenomena with such limited resources.

Identifying

Instead of assuming a pluralist approach to account for various kinds of roles, and the character of our assuming them, Korsgaard argues that our *attitude* towards a role constitutes the sense of contingency that warrants talk about the “construction” of the self. This can be seen in the following passage, which is worth quoting at length:

⁴ Korsgaard’s general idea is that correct role-relatedness provides us with reasons to act qua a role, and seemingly *only* with regards to that role. However, it is unclear if these reasons are only triggered in agential contexts that are relevantly related to the role in question. This addition is necessary if we are to explain *when* a reason justifies an action qua a role, thus stopping the appeal to any role in any context. But if we make this move we must ask how the relationship between roles and their agential contexts is to be understood? Korsgaard doesn’t explain this. I am sceptical whether we can delineate the contexts in which a role is related to reasons for action. We should also question whether different roles can supply the same reason to act, and if multiple roles can be engaged in one context. The latter possibility is supported by Goffman’s observation (1961) that serving the “point” of one role might, in some contexts, be best be served by acting for reasons that arise from another role altogether.

However it goes, reasoned or arbitrary, chosen or merely the product of circumstance, the sorts of identities I am talking about remain contingent in this sense: whether you treat them as a source of reasons and obligations is up to you. If you continue to endorse the reasons the identity presents to you, and observe the obligations it imposes on you, then it's you [...] you can walk out even on a factually grounded identity like being a certain person's child or a certain nation's citizen, dismissing the reasons and obligations that it gives /rise to, because *you just don't identify yourself with that role*. Then it's not a form of *practical* identity anymore: not a description under which you value yourself. On the flip side, you can wholeheartedly endorse even the most arbitrary form of identification, treating its reasons and obligations as inviolable laws. Making the contingent necessary is one of the tasks of human life and the ability to do it is arguably a mark of a good human being. To do your job as if it were the most important thing in the world, love your spouse as if your marriage was made in heaven, treat your friends as if they were the most important people in the world—is to treat your contingent identities as the sources of absolute inviolable laws.(23, First italics mine)

Identifying with a role, irrespective of its contingency, is the form of relatedness that renders it partly constitutive of who one is. We are to understand identification in terms of the normative aspects of the role. If we have endorsed the obligations and norms that comprise a role we have thereby identified with it. The first-personal character of this process can be gleaned from the final sentence of the quotation above. Korsgaard thinks that endorsement, insofar as it involves *treating* a role in a certain way, radically structures behaviour. Acting qua a role that you've identified with is to be guided by norms that are inviolable for you, thus making the contingent necessary.

Reflecting on Roles

On Korsgaard's account, identifying with roles plays a significant part in rendering oneself intelligible to oneself.⁵ In an earlier text Korsgaard writes,

...to no longer be able to think of yourself under the description under which you value yourself and find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. It is to be for all practical purposes dead or worse than dead. (1996; 102)

⁵ How significant a part depends on whether Korsgaard holds that we are solely constituted from roles (or "practical identities")? If so, we should worry she bootstraps her view. If finding yourself intelligible requires prior processes of identification, and if identification requires a sense of who *you* are (because identifying yourself with a role requires an implicit understanding of *both* relata, one of which is you) then this process can't begin. (A worry suggested by MM. McCabe) Korsgaard's reliance on the notion of identification undermines the thesis that we are solely constituted from our roles or it evidences incoherence in views that argue the self is comprised from various elements and that this requires an antecedent process of 'self-composition'.

If we sidestep the idea of *the* description under which one values oneself, for the moment, we see that being unable to *think* of ourselves under the aspect of identities, or roles, is a purportedly grave matter. It might be inferred from this, as well as from Korsgaard's appeal to endorsement, that Korsgaardian agents have to think often about their roles. This is not the case. Korsgaard suggests role-reflection is not necessary and uncommon. She is clear that she is "not claiming that thoughts about your identity need to come into your reasoning in any explicit way" (2009; 21). Indeed, the only context in which this thought might be explicit is when we are tempted to transgress the norms constitutive of a role

...for beings like us, temptation to resist the claims of our practical identities is possible. And *then* you might have thoughts that explicitly invoke your identities: "I can't do that, she's my best friend!" "What do you take me for? I'm a scientist." Or they might even be offered by another: "You *are* his mother, you know. Who's going to help him if you don't?" (ibid)

Here, we can distinguish between the theoretical question whether such thought is a necessary aspect of deliberation (we should agree with Korsgaard that it is not) and the empirical question, to which I return later, whether people actually think in this way.

Integration

In talking about *the* description under which we are able to think of ourselves, the quotation above points towards a further aspect of Korsgaard's account; that we face the ethical task of integrating our roles into a whole. This thought appears in a number of places:

We have many particular practical identities and so we also face the task of uniting them into a coherent whole. (Ibid)

The task of self-constitution involves finding some roles and fulfilling them with integrity and dedication. It also involves integrating those roles into a single identity, into a coherent life. (25)

The work of pulling ourselves back together is also the work of pulling those identities into a single practical identity, choosing among them when we have to, deciding which is to have priority, harmonizing them when we can. (126)

Constructing, creating, shaping, reshaping, maintaining, improving, in all these ways constituting this kind of identity is the everyday work of practical deliberation. (129)

We are not given a detailed account of what the integrative process involves. Nonetheless, these remarks invite us to consider the question: Why do we have to integrate our roles? Korsgaard's answer seems to be because we have many of them. The fact that there are various ways we can regard ourselves, and many sources of obligations and reasons, appears to generate a demand on us to draw these elements into a unity.

Korsgaard's account of roles, then, holds that they are normatively structured forms that we have to identify with for them to constitute who we are and guide our behaviour. Identification is the sole relation that does the explanatory work. We only think about roles, Korsgaard claims, in contexts where we are tempted to ignore their obligations. Because we have many roles we need to integrate them.

These aspects of her account relate to my introductory remarks. Firstly, does Korsgaard's notion of identification, which is understood in terms of endorsing obligations, capture every significant aspect of our relatedness to the roles that we can make our own? Secondly, do we only seldom think about our roles and does reflection of this kind pose wider ethical problems? Finally, does the undeniable fact that people have many roles grounds an ethical demand to engage in a process of integration?

The rest of this section takes up the first question, namely, is Korsgaard's notion of identification, and its place in her wider account, adequate? This query bears upon later issues of the character of a theory of our relatedness to roles (§2) as well as discussion about how we think about them (§3).

2. Endorsement

In explaining what it means to identify with a role, Korsgaard writes of "observing" and "endorsing" the norms of a role. It is unclear from the context whether these two notions are distinct, or understood as similar. Endorsement, however interpreted, has a positive valence - endorsement of something is to value it and support its persistence - and it appears to admit of two distinct ways in which we might say of someone that they have endorsed a role.

The first interpretation of endorsement holds that we should ascribe it to someone who actively *does* something, over and above how they behave qua a role, to show they endorse that role. The second interpretation holds that we can ascribe endorsement in the absence of such an action. Typically, the action in question will be some form of speech-act. People avow that they endorse this role or that.

As an example of the first interpretation we can imagine a situation in which someone's behaviour seems to accord with the obligations constitutive of a role we think they have. Their behaviour is consistent with the defining characteristics of the role. An anthropologist, for instance, might observe someone living in a small community. This person may have lived in the vicinity for their whole life, lack formal education, lived in accordance to the traditional kinship system and followed the local religion. The anthropologist might observe the everyday behaviour of this person and suggest that they endorse their various roles within this community.

Yet someone might cite instances in which people behave in accordance with the characteristics of a role, but argue that they have not thereby endorsed it. Consider a housewife living in suburban America in the 1900's. Her life is oriented towards caring for her children and husband. The possibility of forging a career, or pursuing advanced education, let us suppose, is closed to her. In looking back at the behaviour of this woman – behaviour that is compliant and unhesitant – a feminist critic might argue that her lack of explicit avowal of her endorsement of this role means that she hasn't endorsed it.

This view aligns with the intuitive contours of the concept of endorsement as I understand it, with commonplace notions of endorsing various things, whether the life choices of our friends, the decisions of a court, the policies of a government; or whether it is the celebrity endorsement of a product, or the intellectual endorsement of a point of view. In most of these cases, people avow their endorsement. Advanced praise on the dust jacket of a book might endorse its conclusions, or a celebrity may permit their image to be associated with a product.

However, we might ask what underpins the feminist critic's concern in the above example. Is it the mere absence of an action, such as an avowal, that is troublesome? No, for words, or actions alone need not indicate whether someone endorses something – as in cases where oppression incentivises compliance and vocal support. Endorsement can be predicated of mental attitudes as well. Is the mere absence of a certain mental

attitude the problem, then? This, again, depends. For what the feminist critic is concerned about is the absence of *reflective* support for a state of affairs.

This example is pertinent, for the *modus operandi* of many emancipation movements is precisely to stimulate various forms of reflection; to raise conscious awareness. Reflecting on something is a form of activity, often a difficult one, thus we might restate the second interpretation of endorsement and suggest that what is important about it is that someone acts in a manner that evidences their sincere reflective support for their role. The trivial example of celebrity endorsement evidences this; the contingent association of a face and product differs from an explicit endorsement. Reflection varies in terms of its quality and duration; talk of it here is only meant to highlight the understanding of endorsement that requires someone to knowingly do something that expresses a judgement about a role as supportable.

What, then, can Korsgaard mean when she suggests that identification is to be understood in terms of endorsement and the observance of a role's norms and reasons? The reflective reading of the notion seems independently more plausible. However, as we saw above, Korsgaard also explicitly suggests we need not reflect on our roles. Thus we have evidence of ambivalence: she agrees that experience is often largely non-reflective, but does so in the context of developing a theory that explicates the first-personal point of view in contrary terms.⁶

Therefore, not only is there a possible ambiguity internal to ascriptions of endorsement, but appealing to endorsement might expose tensions within Korsgaard's account. These tensions centre on the place that reflection has within her theory in relation to our roles. As our relatedness to our roles is often reflective, discussing endorsement, and surveying the structural soundness of Korsgaard's view, prepares us for what follows (§3).

Korsgaard's underlying thinking about roles and identification is congruent with the reflective understanding of endorsement (identification as the considered expression of an attitude about a role) and with her view that we can render non-contingent roles that we have 'ours'. Although endorsement often involves a survey of various alternative possibilities - as when someone endorses a way of life, in a context where they could have chosen otherwise - the fact that it need not necessarily be predicated on choice would be attractive to Korsgaard. Someone who was lucky enough to have

⁶ Cf. Arpaly; 2003; 19.

had a rewarding role during the Soviet era, for example, can reflect on their situation, observe that it cannot change, and yet endorse it nonetheless.

Although these cases seem uncontroversial, a critic, perhaps Korsgaard herself in her reluctance to say we reflect on our roles, might worry they embody an intellectualist attitude towards roles, and towards endorsement more generally. “Even though an individual might never have had explicit thoughts about their situation, their behaviour can evidence their endorsement” or so the argument would begin. As mentioned above, endorsement, on this understanding, can be predicated of someone who doesn’t reflect on their behaviour. If their behaviour coheres with what is known about the norms of a particular role, they endorse it. For this to be an independent view this critic would have to be talking about ascriptions of endorsement, and not claims about what someone *would* endorse were they to reflect, or about probable inferences to the conclusion that someone endorses something.

In addition to the fact that the non-reflective interpretation of endorsement seems misguided, the possibility of error, lacunae in self-knowledge, and more importantly, the forms of alienation and disaffectedness that concern my imagined feminist critic further strain the independent plausibility of this view. Yet a supporter of the non-reflective reading might persist, suggesting that we can talk of *tacit* endorsement, which can be ascribed to someone without their reflectively avowing it.⁷ This critic might draw parallels with the notion of tacit consent, claim that voting in an election constitutes tacit-endorsement of the resulting government, and argue that we can talk of endorsing roles analogously. Thus we have to consider whether this is a viable counter-argument? Is a notion of tacit-endorsement plausible, and if so, does it provide Korsgaard with a clearer interpretation of endorsement that will help her explicate her account of identification?

Relying on tacit-endorsement is problematic because the notion of something’s being tacit is complex. The imagined critic’s analogy with endorsing governments, above, has been convincingly critiqued by Simmonds who questions when *anything* can felicitously be regarded as tacit (1979). Simmonds concludes that for behaviour to constitute tacit consent for something else, a particular convention must be in place, and known to be so, for the behaviour to constitute consent. Simmonds’ well known example is of a company executive who, having changed the time of the next board meeting asks his board members “Any objections?” (79-80) The ensuing silence is

⁷ Suggested to me by Lucy Campbell.

taken to constitute tacit consent for the change of time. It is regarded as tacit because no active or vocal sign of assent was given. It only counts as consent because there is a contingent convention that silence, under the right conditions, constitutes consent, and that all those present know this. If you were unaware of such a convention you could rightly claim that your silence was not an expression of agreement.

As for consent so, I suggest, for endorsement. If Simmonds is right, behaviour counts as tacit-endorsement only if there is a known convention in place that renders it such. In my example of the housewife, a convention might not be in place. The woman is not acting in the knowledge that her behaviour will mean or constitute endorsement of her role as a housewife; and so we might rightly deny that she does endorse it.

Unfortunately for the critic of reflective endorsement, recourse to the notion of tacit-endorsement implicitly supports what they seek to challenge. This is because cases of tacit-endorsement are derivative cases that are only possible if endorsement simpliciter is possible, and if endorsement is typically a form of reflectively doing something to evidence support for that role. Indeed, this is something our critic would have to accept; their analogy with tacit consent helps establish the important connection between reflective action and the concept of endorsement.

Consider, for example, a minister's presence at a meeting of the British cabinet. If they forgo resignation, then – by convention – they endorse the policy decisions reached within the meeting. Their (sustained) presence *is* endorsement. However, situations like this are rare. Were *you* to be physically present at a cabinet meeting, as a stenographer perhaps, your presence in the meeting cannot be understood as endorsement of policy because you do not fall under the convention of cabinet responsibility.

Tacitness requires the fulfilment of the epistemic condition that a convention is present and known about in the context. The convention stands in for explicit reflection and the act of assenting to something. It is implied that someone who falls under the convention is aware of this, they have reflected on it, and they know that their continued presence in cabinet will constitute endorsement of resulting policy. They need not specifically avow their support. The strangeness of this case shows that endorsement is usually reflective; that what someone thinks about an issue is what is important, and that their presence is a reliable indicator that they *think* the policy is a good one.

The conclusion that endorsement is a reflective phenomenon is bolstered by the intuition that endorsement can come in degrees. This has two dimensions. The first concerns the extent to which the object of endorsement is contextualised. For example, a housewife who considers her specific situation in the broader context of a social system's gender hierarchies and divisions of labour endorses her role to a greater extent than someone who considers her situation alone as if it was unrelated to a wider social structure. The second dimension concerns the extent to which someone endorses the central norms of the role in question. They endorse the role more or less depending on how many of these norms they accept.

It is significant that endorsement can be a matter of degree because if a role's "being you" required endorsement of every aspect then you could never forge new ways of identifying with a role. Failure to endorse an aspect would mean that you do not identify with the role simpliciter. That is implausible. Individuals commonly assume roles without endorsing every aspect of them. Recognising this is important because it accommodates the intuition that a critical stance towards the demands of a role can evidence a deeper and mature sense of concern for it; just as love that *can* be critical is more mature than infatuation. Thus, because someone might judge (correctly or not) that some of the normative aspects of their role are more significant than others, or that some ought to be rejected, we should conclude that there is much variation in the manner by which people relate to their various roles. Many kinds of reason can underpin this; the norms might be unjust, or inefficient, or simply intolerable.

It is important for a theory to accommodate this intuition because a discerning endorsement of a particular role is precisely part of what renders it ours. Our overall identity is personal only if our roles are *personalised*, and in virtue of the fact that roles comprise our self-conceptions in different ways, and diverge in their phenomenological resonance. This conclusion is necessitated even with the limitations of Korsgaard's view. For if selves are constituted by roles alone, then for these selves to differ the character of identical roles must differ also; two people must be able to hold the same role differently.

One way for you to have a role that is personal is for you to reflect on it and, via endorsement, come to a conception of how you understand it in relation to yourself. If you're lucky enough to be able to act on the basis of these reflections, then the way you have a role will be personal to you. Even if external, or psychological, constraints

hinder such action the manner in which this role informs your self-conception will reflect your aspirations. More particularly, the phenomenological aspect of your roles – what the role is like for you – will be affected by your endorsements. Regret can follow the inability to endorse, on reflection, a part of the role you have, had, or were unable to avoid.

So far we can conclude the following. There appeared to be two possible readings of endorsement. The first held that reflection is not necessary. That conflicts with our intuitions about the concept. Then I considered a distinction between endorsement that requires reflection on its object, and tacit endorsement. Korsgaard's appeal to endorsement could be read in either of these two ways.

But she should not suggest that *every* instance of role-endorsement is tacit. That would overlook the sense in which something's being tacit is derivative on paradigmatic, non-tacit, cases. Talk of tacit-endorsement is possible, but accounting for our relatedness to roles in this way is allowable only when known conventions allow our role-related behaviour to constitute endorsement of our roles. Such conventions may exist, but it is unlikely they will be numerous.

Therefore, if Korsgaard had to accept the tacit reading, to avoid emphasising reflection about roles, her parsimonious account of our relatedness to roles would be undermined. In other words, if identification is what makes a role 'ours', and if that has to be understood in terms of tacit-endorsement, then we will be unable to have any role that is not the subject of conventions that make endorsement of it possible via our behaviour.

Hence it seems better to suggest most, if not all, cases of endorsing a role require someone to reflect on it. Although this line of thinking accommodates the observation that endorsement can be a matter of degree, and helps us explain how people can have roles in a distinctly personal manner, problems arise if Korsgaard has to suggest that we account for our relatedness to our roles in terms of our reflection on them.

The most significant difficulty is that someone can observe the obligations of a role – i.e. behave in certain ways - whilst failing to reflectively endorse them. This can either be because reflection is absent or because they endorse something else. That they are guided by the norms of a role tells us little about their attitude towards it. But Korsgaard's conception of identification bundles the notions of norm observance and

endorsement together. Thus if having a role (“making it ours”) requires us to endorse it in addition to observing its norms, many people would simply not have a role, regardless of how they behave, because they don’t endorse it.

Korsgaard’s view is therefore blind to the many kinds of attitude that can persist alongside the observance of a role’s behavioural norms. Because endorsement is internal to her notion of identification, which is to account for how roles can become ours in the first place, there just can’t be a person who *is* a teacher, or parent – say – but who fails to endorse their role. This seems false because it makes sense to talk about people having roles they don’t fully endorse. The gap between recognising ourselves as certain things, and yet finding that fact hard to confront, is common.

Furthermore, Korsgaard’s view requires that having a role is reflective in all cases because reflectiveness is integral to the interpretation of endorsement that makes a parsimonious account viable. She could render her view less parsimonious, perhaps suggesting that we can account for identification in terms of endorsement *or* tacit-endorsement. However, tacit-endorsement is intrinsically, yet indirectly, related to the notion of reflection via the epistemic convention condition, which means we cannot avoid reflecting on our roles in some sense. This consequence of Korsgaard’s account will be considered later (§3).

To anticipate, we might be able to talk of someone having a role in the absence of any reflection about it, and – more significantly – the form of reflection that Korsgaard’s account might require may itself generate problems with regards to particular roles. In other words, relying on the notion of endorsement might make it impossible for some roles to be ‘had’ properly insofar as it is a normative aspect of those roles that reflection about them is *absent*.

Theoretically, suggesting endorsement is the only attitudinal aspect of what makes a role part of you overlooks the vast range of other ethically pertinent attitudes. Perhaps the most significant of these occurs when someone is alienated from a role the behavioural norms of which they nonetheless observe. Korsgaard’s account precludes the possibility of people whose self-conceptions are constituted by various roles, but who relate to them in ways that are negative or troubling. This follows because the very notion of endorsement is positively charged. If *having* a role requires someone to assume a broadly positive attitude towards it, then tragic cases, where someone acts under the auspices of a role that they find unbearable or which they wish to reject, are

impossible. Yet these are the cases that are most ethically troubling; re-stating the problem by suggesting that these people's roles are not 'theirs', or are not roles at all, is perverse.

This argument might strike you as misguided. Can't we think of cases like alienation, for example, as the failure to endorse a role? That objection fails because it is incorrect to claim that we are alienated from everything we do not reflectively endorse. To take a trivial example, I might drink a cappuccino as I type my thesis. I have not (until now) reflected upon this fact. Thus I have *ipso facto* not endorsed it either. Yet it is not the case that I am alienated from my coffee habit. I could stop drinking cappuccinos or start supping espressos without a threat to my identity. This aspect of my life is not a candidate for alienation. This example⁸ is not role-related but it evidences the mistake in thinking that anything remaining unendorsed is something from which we are alienated. This conclusion applies to roles. It doesn't follow from the fact that I have not endorsed my role as a teaching-tutor that I am alienated from it. I might be; I might not. The question has to be answered in its own terms.

In addition, the presence of reflection about a role might actually cause alienation (§3). If that is plausible, then we have further reason to avoid a theory of roles with a prominent place for reflection in connection with explaining how they become ours. Korsgaard's view would imply that *more* positive reflection is what the alienated person needs to allow a role to eventually constitute their identity. However, it will transpire that often the opposite is the case.

To summarise, Korsgaard's appeal to endorsement runs into difficulty because endorsement is a positive notion that requires reflection. The latter leaves no room for instances in which either someone contingently does not reflect on a role they have, as well as cases in which someone *ought not* to so reflect. The former excludes people whose identities might contain roles in a manner that is not positive, for example the person who is alienated from their role.

⁸ Put to me, in a slightly different form, by Edward Harcourt.

3. Treating ‘As If’

There is a further layer to Korsgaard’s account of identification that fails to accommodate the variety of possible ways in which someone might be related to a role. Recall her description of how we render roles ours:

Making the contingent necessary is one of the tasks of human life and the ability to do it is arguably a mark of a good human being. To do your job as if it were the most important thing in the world, love your spouse as if your marriage was made in heaven, treat your friends as if they were the most important people in the world—is to treat your contingent identities as the sources of absolute inviolable laws. (23)

Here, we are told what it is to treat our contingent identities as a set of inviolable laws. It is not said explicitly that we *ought* to treat a role this way but this is the implicit conclusion of the paragraph. These attitudes are presented as admirable; part of what it is to be a good person. Yet what it would be like to treat one’s friends, child or lover as if they were the most important people in the world? This seems to be part of Korsgaard’s general discussion of the whole process of identifying with our roles. Yet it seems entirely wrongheaded.

I will not deny that it is possible to treat people “as if” they are significant. Instead, I want to argue several things. Firstly, such treating is not a paradigmatic aspect of identification; rather, it can be a marginal and potentially tragic attitude to take towards someone. It shows how relatedness to a role might go *wrong*. Secondly, with regards to some relationships, suggesting that we treat people like this is to make a substantive mistake about what it is to be in such a relationship in the first place.

I shall focus on the idea of treating someone as if they were “the best person in the world” as an example of “as if” identification. Contained in the notion of “treating” is the implication that they are not the best person, or we should question whether they are. If they are not the best person in the world, we must ‘treat’ them as if they are. That might require forms of self-deception to come to believe that someone is the best in the world. Even if we avoid active forms of deception, treating someone as if they are something we know they are not requires duplicity, for one appraises them in one way, but acts in a manner that doesn’t reflect this appraisal. This is a problematic consequence for a general account of roles because it overlooks the fact that people

care about the connection between their role and reality; the ‘as if’ mode does not respect what is actually the case.

Stefan Collini describes the “embarrassing eulogy” John Stuart Mill wrote about his wife Harriet, and shows how someone’s judgement of another goes awry. In suggesting she was “more of a poet than Shelly, more of a philosopher than himself, and so on” Collini takes Mill to have displayed what his first biographer described as “his extraordinary hallucination as to the personal qualities of his wife” (1999; 123). This is a case in which someone *really does* think their loved one is best person in the world. Yet we can see there is something amiss here. Mill lacks judgement. Thinking as he does signals delusory attachment insofar as Harriet has faults and foibles like everyone else. Looking at examples in which people actually behave ‘as if’ their loved ones were the best in the world illustrates that Korsgaard foregrounds something that is marginal or even pathological. It would be a mistake, therefore, to suggest that thinking like this is necessary for us to identify with our roles.

These remarks concern the interpretation of being the “best person in the world” that is concerned with someone’s measurable achievements or general status; the sense in which Harriet, although talented, was not as accomplished as Mill judged her to be. However, reflecting on people as being the best, or most accomplished, can mislead in general terms because there is something problematic in the very questioning of whether someone is the best person in the world, in relation to your love of them.

Korsgaard’s remarks suggest that loving someone in the face of the contingency that characterises any love requires a hard fight to regard them as having a certain status or properties such that compared to others the beloved is better. What this neglects, however, is those relations of love, or other relations of care, which often underpin and inform roles (such as being a wife, husband, or parent) are not paradigmatically responsive to status in this way.

Harry Frankfurt articulates this idea (2004). He argues for the important conclusion that love and care constitute someone as being the best or most important for you; as opposed to you constituting them as such. Contrary to the view which suggests a judgement of someone’s importance is what allows you to love them, your *antecedent* love of them positions you to then regard them as the most important people in your life. This is what it means to say that someone is the most important person in your life.

You cannot help that this is so even if you can take steps to deaden the effects of such love.

Frankfurt's important insight is that one does not love someone on the basis of their qualities, even if, contingently, they are the most estimable. Instead, a loved one is a source of final ends that imbue your life with meaning and structure. This fact, captured through the term "volitional necessity", explains why you are attentive to, and interested in, their qualities. Because you care about them, you then attend more closely to what they like. Indeed, your caring, or loving, might lead you as with Mill, to *misapprehend* what someone is actually like. To suggest otherwise is to invert the order of explanation.

When we think about roles and relations of love in Frankfurt's terms, we can see that there is something tragically flawed in failing to see that loving and caring about someone are matters of volitional necessity. Imagine a parent who believes that their love *must* be responsive to the characteristics of their child, to their abilities, beliefs, hopes and aspirations. This parent might be acutely aware that their child is not the most able, or has limited aspirations and foreshortened hopes. There is something bleak about realising this and then proceeding to parent 'as if' their child was more able, or really aspired to achieve greater things.

This behaviour is doubly problematic and does not convey love for a child. It rests on a false premise: that loving ought to be fundamentally responsive to facts about its object.⁹ Entertaining this premise generates the second problem that, because the child in our example falls short of what their parent desires, the parent either has to deceive herself about these facts, or neglect her child. Together, these problems yield the real issue arising in this case: that this parent will obscure the love they really could offer their child. The child will suffer, and possibly for their entire life.

Mill loved his wife deeply, and this love led – we can suppose – to his inability to accurately appraise his wife's abilities. We often talk of being "blinded by love" and that is what we might mean. Yet our judgement of Mill would be much more damning if his willingness to love proved to be only in response to these perceived abilities. We can be led into thinking that someone is better than they really are because we love

⁹ The phrase "fundamental responsiveness" avoids the false view that *how* we love is totally isolated from facts about *who* we love. Loving is influenced by what people are like and cultural modes of expression. (Larmore; 2010, chapter 2).

them, but this is an understandable and commonplace possibility. Having considered Frankfurt's thesis, I suggest we would find it problematic if we met someone who claimed they loved only because of the qualities the object of their love had.

A way of communicating this point to the person in question would be to engage them in an imaginative exercise in which they consider their response were their loved one's relevant qualities to change. More cautiously, we could appeal to cases in which those we love are tragically transformed and yet our love persists, as might happen in cases of mental illness. If our interlocutor remained impassive we would question their character. We might ask what leads them to maintain their view; about their own experiences of love (or not being loved), and so on.

Our concern for our interlocutor shows us that what might seem sorrowful from a third-personal perspective can be deeply damaging from the personal-perspective. The belief, whether explicit or not, that their love *ought* to supervene on the qualities of their child, will alienate someone from their child, and possibly from themselves (§3). The consequences of this mistake will colour their relationship, and compromise their ability to live a flourishing life. More generally, the phenomenological aspects of this person's parental role will be compromised in a variety of ways; their disappointment or bitterness will inhibit their love for their children.

People are likely to assume the 'as if' attitude willingly only in contexts of crisis or despair. Imagine hearing of someone who might show us this. To a third party she might seem to take her role seriously. She complies with the various demands that others place on her and she follows the obligations internal to her role. But to someone who knows her better, she is disaffected. She questions the significance of what she does and resents that she has to meet the demands of a role she assumed when younger and upon which others depend today. This person might live amongst her friends and family without their noticing her disaffection until it is too late and she renounces her role.

We can imagine this woman's growing awareness of the decreasing friction between herself and the role she assumed. In response to this, in an attempt to remedy what she regards as her failure, she may seek to 'pull herself together' by assuming the 'as if' attitude towards the activities and individuals connected to her role. Perhaps she hopes this will lead to actual enthusiasm. Thus she affects diligence and congeniality at work.

She loves her child as if he is the most important person in the world. She tries to overturn the contingency of her marriage in her attitude towards her worried husband.

In response to this imagined case we must ask: Is this woman well constituted by her role? I am reluctant to suggest she is. Instead we witness a slide away from identification towards forms of pretence. This is a sorrowful predicament, one characteristic of despair, not a paradigmatic instance of when things are going well. That this person, on a reading of Korsgaard's appeal to the notion of acting 'as if', might count as a clear case of someone who identifies with their roles as mother and wife only serves as a *reductio ad absurdum* of this aspect of Korsgaard's account; attempts to assume the 'as if' mode towards a role can occasion despair and crisis.¹⁰

Thinking that having any roles at all involves a kind of performance is an attractive view. You might be tempted to agree with Kurt Vonnegut in thinking "we are what we pretend to be", irrespective of whether you agree with his caveat, "so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (cited in 2003; 203). A similar, less circumspect view, abounds in the rhetoric of Erving Goffman (§2) and Korsgaard's notion of "as if" can be read in a similar manner.

The seductions of views like this have to be resisted. They are attractive because they cast agents as akin to stage actors and trade on enticing theatrical metaphors. But they leave no room for a clear distinction between sincere action and thought, and forms of pretence. In Korsgaard's account, this additional layer to her understanding of identification only serves to weaken it.

My discussion of Korsgaard's idea that people have to behave qua their roles in the 'as if' mode, sought to expose the fact that these agents seem tragic, or alienated; maturity in the face of contingency shouldn't demand this. The former conclusion is surprising in light of the earlier claim that her account cannot accommodate the alienated (and examples below (§2)). The list of possible forms of role-relatedness is lengthy; that it suggests that identification is one relation amongst others. Korsgaard's account leaves no space to account for the distinctions between various ways in which people relate to

¹⁰ Someone might object that my concerns about acting "as if" are viable only if we entertain a restrictively literal reading of Korsgaard's account. My reading is faithful to the tone of the passages from which it is drawn but more importantly the view that rendering a role yours requires the adoption of the 'as if' attitude is independently engaging and should be addressed on its own terms.

their roles and in making this theoretical move she appeals to examples that, far from being paradigmatic of persons who identify with their roles, portray them as alienated.

The intuition that to make a role ‘ours’ we have to *do* something underlies the ‘as if’ mode of reflection about roles. The intuition appears behind Korsgaard’s appeal to endorsement. In both cases, behaving on the basis of role in a manner that transforms its contingency and anchors it from the personal-perspective requires various kinds of reflection. Recognising this bears upon the question of whether reflection on our roles can be ethically problematic. The parent, who thinks what it is to be a parent is to relate their love to the qualities of their children, is engaged in a process of mistaken reflection about parenting that will detrimentally affect their relationships. It will also bear upon their wider sense of identity insofar as their self-constitution is oriented around roles like this. In the face of this example we can ask whether other patterns of role-related thought can go awry (§3, §4).

Discussing the contours of role-directed thought allows us to understand some pitfalls that shadow attempts to reflect ethically. In particular, these considerations enrich discussion of integration: the formal ethical task within Korsgaard’s account of practical identity. Proper discussion of integration will have to heed the various developments that I make to a theory of our relatedness to roles (§2). At present it suffices to make a single observation.

Korsgaard supposes that roles are the elements from which a unified self is constructed. This commits her to the assumption that roles are themselves stable things. I expose this premise here because if it turns out, after more detailed thought about our relatedness to roles, and the character of our thinking about them, that they are unstable or fragile, or demand the absence of reflection, then we will have reason to challenge the notion of integration as presented by Korsgaard. At the very least we need to rethink what is internal to the ‘effort’ of the ethical life with regards to roles.

I outlined several aspects of Korsgaard’s account of practical identity as a means of thinking about roles. In particular, I considered whether her account of our relatedness to roles was adequate. I concluded that her notion of identification lacks nuance, and that other forms of relatedness have to be considered if we are to develop a faithful and perspicuous understanding of the ways in which we comport ourselves towards our roles.

4. Towards a New Account

A thought provoking examination of roles is to be found in Erving Goffman's essay *Role Distance* (1961). He draws several distinctions that can focus our inquiry after roles and aid our consideration of the questions outlined above. Goffman's general observational framework is not without criticism. He has been critiqued for an overly fragmented conception of the self (Lahire; 2011) and for a general blindness to deeper forms of self-presentation and general psychological relatedness to action (Hochschild; 2003abc) I set these criticisms aside because they do not affect what follows.

Korsgaard's account of roles regards them as normatively structured forms towards which we relate ourselves. Goffman provides us with a more detailed way of thinking about these two aspects; his consideration of the latter occupies us below. At the heart of this is his distinction between "commitment" and "attachment" to a role.

By "commitment" Goffman means the sense in which a person's "doing or being" a particular role

...irrevocably conditions other important possibilities in his life, forcing him to take courses of action, causing other persons to build up their activity on the basis of his continuing in his current undertakings, and rendering him vulnerable to unanticipated consequences of these undertakings (1961; 89)

Being committed is to be "locked into a position and coerced into living up to the promises and sacrifices built into it" (ibid). When we take up a job, enter into relationships, or become a parent, we become committed to a role in this sense. In being so committed we are exposed to the consequences and opportunity costs that arise from the role we now have. We trigger complex expectations and people's beliefs about us will change. Saying of someone that they are committed to a role implies nothing about their attitudes towards it. Rather, it describes the external constraints upon them. Understanding commitment in Goffman's sense differs from the sense of the concept evidenced in claims like: "He was really committed to his wife."

The notion of "attachment" describes attitudes someone can assume towards what Goffman terms the "self-image" available to someone in virtue of a role. In *Role Distance*, Goffman examines this notion within very local contexts such as the surgical

theatre, or a fairground ride. But we can also speak about being attached to a role in general.

Someone is attached to a role just in case they are “affectively and cognitively enamoured” of the role and “desiring and expecting to see [themselves] in terms of the enactment of the role and the self-identification emerging from this enactment” (ibid). This definition has its problems (§2) but the general thrust of what Goffman means is clear. For example, we can imagine someone who is elected to a prestigious intellectual academy and who becomes attached to this new role, regarding herself as an academician, hoping others will do so, and exuding the grandeur of the role. In acquiring this role, she has acquired a new way to think about herself. Someone who is attached to their role will conceive of themselves in the terms of it and adopt the self-image provided by the role without hesitation.

Attachment and commitment often coalesce around one single role but not necessarily. Goffman’s example is of parents who wish to give their child up for adoption. They are committed to the role of parenting insofar as they are factually the biological parents of a particular child. As a consequence they have legal responsibility for the child, can be held culpable for neglect, and can be morally praised, or blamed under this description. But they need not be attached to the role. Indeed, that fact can explain why they seek to vacate it in having their child adopted. In the meantime they may resist thinking of themselves in terms of being parents and discourage those that do. This example shows how someone can have commitment without attachment. Goffman’s example of the converse is that of a childless couple seeking to adopt a child. They are attached to the role, yet as they don’t have legal charge of a child, they cannot be said to be committed to it. Other people wouldn’t think of them as parents until the time that they had responsibility of the child. This example supports an earlier *en passant* point made against Korsgaard’s account, namely, that aspiring to be in a role is an important form of relatedness to a role that any account must consider.

Significantly, Goffman’s distinction between attachment and commitment accounts for the forms of incongruity or distance experienced by the figures within my examples. Those examples centred on the people with unendorsed roles. Now we can say that they are committed to a role but not attached to it, or that their attachment is a matter of degree.

Distinguishing between commitment and attachment supports the idea that our role-relatedness is complex. Attachment is a more nuanced notion than commitment. Like commitment, third-personal ascriptions of attachment are possible. But they require a closer understanding of reflective attitudes of the person concerned; of their thoughts, beliefs, and – insofar as emotions are cognitive - their emotions.

It is true that commitment to a role can also be feigned. But this usually requires a degree of attachment to the role. Actors and confidence-tricksters rely on a deep immersion into the characters they project; attentiveness to the phenomenological resonances of what it would be to be what it is they pretend to be. The notion of attachment is therefore related to the various epistemological complexities that surround cases of self-knowledge, authenticity and integrity. Even when people are clearly committed to roles, the *manner* in which this is so – their attachment – can be inauthentic. Someone can turn out to be unattached to a role despite their attempts to project the contrary impression.

Goffman's distinction allows us to begin developing a more nuanced way of thinking about roles, starting with attachment. That notion, however, requires unpacking. Goffman does not elaborate on ideas like being "affectively enamoured" by a role, nor does he consider the significance of these forms of desire and expectation from a first-personal perspective. It is clear that there is more to be said about the notion of attachment. It appears to have several, possibly distinct, aspects. Looking closer at the concept of attachment as it pertains to roles will allow me to engage further with my outstanding questions. With this in mind I will now turn to considering attachment in more detail.

SECTION TWO

- Aspects of Attachment -

Introduction

This section presents my account of the general character of our relatedness to our roles. I argue for a particular understanding of this relatedness; that attachment has certain form that differs from that presented by Korsgaard. Firstly, our relatedness to a role is a normative matter. Secondly, that the norms that guide our relatedness to a role actually constitute that role. Thirdly, there might be two perspectives on attachment: the cognitive and the affective. The rest of this thesis examines “cognitive attachment” in more detail.

I. Attachment

Pre-theoretically, the term “attachment” is quite general; it can be used to refer to a variety of attitudes towards numerous objects. Some intellectual disciplines give the term a more specific sense. Within the domain of psychology, the concept is central to the eponymous attachment theory that examines the long-term psychological significance of different forms of early parent-child relations or their absence (Bowlby; 2010). Attachment also features in neurobiological studies of the social and moral behaviour of various mammalian species (Churchland; 2011).

Goffman suggests that being attached to a role is to be “affectively and cognitively enamoured” of it. Understood literally this attempt at a definition is misleading. Attachment shouldn’t always be theorised in terms of love because we would be in no position to delineate true instances of the latter from the former. Someone might come to love a role they have, but such cases are not ubiquitous. For the purposes of what follows I want to avoid explicating the more general notion of assuming an attitude towards a role in terms of one particular attitude.

Goffman would resist a literal understanding of attachment in terms of being enamoured. Instead, attachment, when considered in terms of roles, is to be thought of as loose notion that captures the ways in which someone is directed towards a role.

This might be a role under which they act; one whose obligations and constraints they recognise. It can also be a role to which they hope to be committed, as in Goffman's example of a couple who seek to adopt a child and thereby become parents. Finally, it can be a role someone is no longer committed to; as when an ex-military officer finds it hard to adjust to life after retirement. Attachment bears upon the nature of someone's behaviour, in general, qua a role. Knowing about the character of someone's attachment to a role makes their actions intelligible, although not necessarily justifiable, as we shall see.

Attachment has two facets. The first concerns someone's attitudes about a role. The second is the attitude someone might bear to themselves qua the role. This distinction is important, and visible in Goffman's notion of the "virtual self" that a role provides an agent. We can think about roles in general terms but having a role also helps us think about ourselves. Roles comprise our self-conceptions and ground our self-esteem, or self-hatred, and anchor a personal concern with integrity. The more roles we have, the richer our self-conception becomes, and the more ways of regarding ourselves we have. Roles are the modes of presentation of the self.

These two facets of attachment are sometimes distinct, and sometimes connected. How we think about a role in general terms can influence how we come to think of ourselves with regards to a role we have and vice versa. For example, someone's understanding of being "a psychoanalyst" inflects the part of their self-conception that is made possible by the fact they are a psychoanalyst. Conversely, the relationship between these two aspects can be inverted; someone might have a limited conception of what being a psychoanalyst can accommodate because of how they regard themselves as one. Their preoccupation with one perspective on the role impedes recognition of the fact that it is *a* perspective, and that there might be others. This is similar to the mistaken parent (§1), and will be further discussed in the third section below, which examines further complexities of these forms of relatedness, and the thoughts that comprise them.

Attachment doesn't necessarily involve reference to specific and widely shared role descriptions like "father" or "lawyer". People can have their own idiosyncratic forms of reference and self-understanding. However generic role-descriptions are prevalent because they inform particular aspects of our general self-conceptions such as esteem, and *that* requires a degree of comparability with other people and how they regard

themselves. Role descriptions are the vehicles of these comparisons. They mediate between personal and social perspectives.

One example of this is that many of the most important people in our lives are addressed in terms that can also be used to speak of general roles. Children, for example, call their parents and relatives by their role, and not their name.¹¹ The general and the particular coalesce around these terms and, insofar as a child uses them, they mediate their relation to those closest to them in words that also gesture beyond themselves towards general social ways of being. It is plausible to think that as a child grows to have their own children, their developing self-understanding as a “mother” or “father” will never fully escape the orbit of who these terms were originally used to refer to (or not to, in the case of an absent parent) (§3).

2. Attachment is Normative

Consider an example drawn from personal experience, which illuminates the character of attachment. My aunt, for largely forgotten reasons, distances herself from her sister’s family. But every year, without fail, she painstakingly honours the various commitments she regards as internal to her familial role. Christmas and birthday cards are never late; important occasions never pass unnoticed; the development of her nieces and nephews is a matter of formal concern. If affection and commitment to the children of one’s siblings were measured in these terms she would be admirable. However, she is primarily concerned with acting on the basis of her conception of what it is to be an aunt. This is evident in her behaviour but also in her explicit resistance to how others who convey their views to her understand this role. Central to her conception is the implicit sense of enlightened perspective; that she knows “what is best”. She maintains distance from her sister, gives unsolicited advice about childcare despite her lack of personal experience, displays of affection are lacking (they are presumably in tension with maintaining the requisite sense of perspective) cards and presents are austere and provide opportunities for ‘improvement’ rather than relating to the interests of the children in question, and so on. The predictable gulf between the character of her concern and what her relatives are actually like is both amusing, and saddening. “What will it be this year?” her niece wonders as her birthday beckons, knowing both that she will hear from her aunt without fail and that she will feel like she’s being confused with another, more ‘proper’ child.

¹¹ Miriam Pryke emphasised this point to me.

Laughing at the incongruity of this case softens its sad side. Our sadness arises due to the manner in which this woman relates to “being an aunt”. Her attachment manifests itself primarily in terms of a deontic concern with being an aunt. This form of attachment is resiliently stubborn, which evidences the further fact that she is beholden to her conception of being an aunt in a particular way. It is inflexible and not open to revision in the face of ongoing experience and thus akin to a poorly developed literary figure. She differs from someone who has a similar conception, but who questions it and repeatedly reflects on its ethical adequacy. It is arguable that my aunt’s conception of herself blinds her to the value and good inherent in those that make this role possible in the first place; namely, her family. Her particular form of attachment to the role is a potential source of reasonable regret. Irrespective of whether we go so far as to say she is presents a self-parody, it is clear that we can call into question this woman’s attachment to being an aunt. Our sadness when faced with this case strikes others as reasonable. It can be justified, which suggests that one’s general attachment to a role is itself a normative matter. That is to say, the way a person relates to a role like being an aunt is open to critique. This is something different from what can be said about the role itself, i.e. that it is problematic or unnecessary, and so on.

This example suggests that a person’s attachment to their roles is a normative matter. More generally, this conclusion is supported by the intelligibility of questioning someone’s relatedness to a role; of finding the character of their attachment – like that of my aunt – open to justifiable concern or critique. The example also illustrates that someone’s attitude to the norms, obligations and expectations that constitute a role can be a matter of concern from both the first-personal and third-personal perspectives. The way in which this concern manifests itself might reflect these differences of perspective.

The form of our concern for how someone relates to their roles reveals that often the norms of attachment are subtle. My aunt and the neglectful academic of the introduction can both be the subject of questioning about the degree and manner to which they are attached to their roles. We can ask ourselves if they are over-attached to their roles; or whether, as in the case of the academic perhaps, they should be more attached than they are. The underlying logic of these questions, addressed to others, points to the possibility of asking ourselves: “How should I relate to this role?”

Noticing that our attachment to roles is a normative matter moves us beyond Goffman who does not consider this aspect of attachment. What is more, his use of the term might be thought to imbue it with a positive valence. It is easy to suggest that if you are attached to something then you are in a positive attitudinal state with regards to it, possibly one that values the role abstractly, supports its activities or point, and so on.

However, as my examples illustrate, attachment simply concerns a person's attitudinal relation to a role. Since that relation is itself the subject of normative discussion, it might arise that being properly attached to a role is not particularly positive. Adequate attachment to roles like being a riot policeman or bailiff might require one to have negative attitudes towards it, or certain characteristic activities internal to it, or to not value its persistence. Thus we should use "attachment" to capture the general manner of one's relatedness to a role.

Because attachment to a role is normative, the question "How should I relate to this role?" is the natural subject of ethical reflection which inquires, "How one ought to live?" That question should be understood as prosaically as possible. It touches upon many aspects of a life, such as what to care about, what to direct effort towards, how to love, what to aim for, and so on -- ordinary pressing concerns that don't require a distinct vocabulary and which are paradigmatic subjects of ethical questioning. Because Korsgaard suggests that our lives can be understood in terms of practical identity we see that these related issues assume central importance in the context of her view; this may account for its initial attractiveness.

Attachment might feature in the context of questioning how to live because a person whom we care about has attitudes towards their role that appear to be in tension with what we understand them as valuing (or what we think they ought to value). For instance, a parent's over-attachment to their job can have problematic consequences in other dimensions of their life. It might impugn their concern for their role as a parent. They might even fail to see that they could relate to themselves in this way; that their self-conception could be richer, more complex, more rewarding, and perhaps more stable. Because the manner in which someone is attached to a role goes some way to determine how they are constituted by it the ethical questions surrounding the nature of attachment in the context of a life are significant.

The ethical questioning of attachment can assume various forms. One concerns the beliefs that mediate someone's relatedness to their role, and the focus that makes that

role possible. Recall the parent who believed their love of their child ought to be responsive to the perceived qualities of that child (§1). I argued this belief was mistaken. A belief of this kind, which is explicitly about the role in question, and which will influence the nature of one's behaviour qua the role, can inform the nature of a person's relatedness to being a parent. This parent's attachment to this role will be partly understood in terms of this belief. Often, understanding attachment is easier from a third-personal perspective because other people are well placed to ask whether attachment of this kind is appropriate. "Should this person be attached in that way, to her role?" "Is *that* part of how one ought to live?"

Other critiques of attachment to a role include asking whether someone is "too into" it or not; whether their judgements about it reflect how they feel about it; how their thoughts about the role relate to their wider values and commitments. Encountering someone who doesn't avow the value of being a parent, for example, would prompt us to reflect on the nature of their attachment to this role. We should question whether they ought to avow this. A practical response to that question would prompt this parent to reflect on their role and question its value. Reflection of this kind is common; we often address it to ourselves. Frequent causes of it include contexts where roles conflict or require prioritisation, and in our dealings with other people (who serve as a mirror of our attachments, insofar as we assess ourselves in relation to others). We have to be careful in describing examples, however, because it is easy to blur the distinction between attachment to a *role* and a more specific attachment to the *object* or focus of the role (§3). But we do make these distinctions in everyday life, and encounter people who seem more attached to a role than its object.

3. The Structure of Attachment

So far, I have established that the ways in which we relate to roles are subject to norms. The possibility of trenchant criticism, whether of others, or ourselves, pointed to this conclusion. But how is our relatedness to roles to be understood in detail?

You might read this section so far, agree that attachment is normative, that we can fail to be related to a role in the right way, but then suggest that this can be specified in general terms, i.e. that there is a single account of apt attachment. Indeed, you might think that we can retain the loose outline of Korsgaard's idea of identification and sufficiently explain the above. On this view, my aunt simply fails to identify with her role; she has identified with something else; a caricature of the role, and one rejected by

other people in her life. “*That*, is the cause of our concern”, the objection might go. “If only she had identified with the right role.” This objection, however, is ultimately unsuccessful for two reasons.

Firstly, it mobilises Korsgaard’s (already critiqued) notion of identification (§1). That is ill suited for explicating the ways in which our attachment to a role might be normative because it only recognises one attitudinal connection between someone and their role, namely, endorsement. An objection that re-engages Korsgaardian identification misses the mark because it has the consequence that no account of *attachment* can actually be given. Instead, the phenomena that suggest that ethical questions can be raised about the character of our relatedness to our roles would have to be explained through appeals to an expanded ontology of roles and pseudo-roles. We would have to say my aunt goes awry in endorsing something that is not a ‘real’ role instead of saying my aunt’s relatedness to her role is what is problematic. This seems lead to the proliferation of role-like things, a consequence that is in tension with the ordinary ways in which we talk about the *way* someone goes about being an aunt, or parent, or doctor.

There is a second problem with the Korsgaardian objection. Because it would have to account for the normative aspects of our relatedness to a role in terms of endorsement, a notion that requires a reflective reading to be viable, it cannot account for two phenomena. The first is any context in which being rightly attached to a role requires one not to endorse it or all of its aspects. The second is that as endorsement seems to require reflection of some kind, then this Korsgaardian approach cannot accommodate instances in which being related in the right way requires the absence of reflection about a role (§3). An instance of this general phenomenon is seen in my aunt. It is her *thinking* about the role that is problematic and we should be careful not to overlook that. Suggesting that identification can do the explanatory work will blind us to the details of cases like this. We might say that my aunt is a Korsgaardian, she is trying to identify with the role, and that is the problem.

In response to these counter-objections, you might concur that accounting for the normative aspects of our relatedness to roles in terms of identification alone is too crude. Therefore, perhaps Korsgaard’s view should be amended to accommodate *multiple* relations to account for how we come to have roles. You might ask: Why must we think that the constitution of the self needs to draw from a single source? There could several ways in which we comport ourselves towards roles. If plausible, this

approach might account for why our relatedness is normative. We could explain instances of apparent inapt attachment by suggesting that they have mismatched the form of relatedness with the role. If there are relations other than identification which explain how we should be attached to our roles then it would be important to make sure that we assume the correct relation to a particular role.

How can we spell this idea out in more detail? The first step would consider what these different relations might be like. One distinction could be between roles that seem to require reflection, and those that draw on practical-knowledge and action. Alternatively, we could distinguish between roles that can be rigidly circumscribed, and those that cannot. In both cases, we could posit two kinds of attachment. If someone is a parent or aunt, say, then they ought to be attached to this role in a way that is non-reflective. If someone is an engineer, or a policeman, say, then they ought to be more circumspect and reflective. In both cases there is a structural similarity between the role and the character of our relatedness to it. Perhaps the latter roles require more reflection, closer attention to the constitutive demands of the role in the context of action, and an emphasis on endorsement, as Korsgaard suggests. This approach suggests that our relatedness to roles is best explained by appealing to determinate kinds of attachment understood in terms of the roles to which they apply.

This alternative view still seems crude. Firstly, we should wonder about how to accommodate roles that seem to require reflective and practical processes in equal measure. (Being a psychoanalyst would appear to be an example of this.)¹² Indeed, most roles will require various kinds of knowledge and reflection. Secondly, if we approach the problem from another direction, and try to argue for distinct relations, in virtue of which roles can be categorised, we are also likely to run into difficulties. In adequately defining a relation that can do the explanatory work it is likely that many or all roles could be understood in terms of it in some contexts. Either this account will collapse back into a single relation view like Korsgaard's or else there will be much disagreement about how to taxonomise these relations. Retaining the simplicity of Korsgaard's view, whilst accommodating requisite diversity to account for the various kinds of role-related critique we can address to someone will be difficult. It might require gerrymandering relations into being in a way that will seem artificial and removed from ordinary ethical reflection.

¹² See Makari; 2008 and *A Question of Lay Analysis* in Freud; 2008.

In response to this worry, you might suggest that it is simply a matter of specifying the relevant relations in enough detail, or multiplying their number until we can sufficiently explain cases like that of my aunt. That might be plausible, but this approach is subject to several other objections to which I will now turn.

The multiple-relations approach still rests on an underlying supposition of Korsgaard's account, namely, that our relatedness to a role is to be specified independently of it. That assumption is seemingly supported by some of the questions we can ask of ourselves. The worry "is she too into that?" might be thought to rest on the general idea that one can be "too into" this or that. In turn, that thought might support inquiries into more general forms of relatedness, in which we question what constitutes over-attachment, or under-attachment, simpliciter. This assumption is problematic and that the idea that our relatedness to a role is specifiable independently of the role should be resisted. We cannot specify what constitutes apt attachment to a class of roles, say by appealing to a feature they have; instead we have to approach each role in its particularity. This is different from the revised version of Korsgaard's view with different kinds of relation because that view, in delineating relations with regards to *kinds* of role, still specifies the relation independently from any particular role. My reasons for rejecting this are twofold.

Firstly, I am sceptical that we can find the requisite features that justify thinking that a certain class of roles should be thought about, and comportment towards, in the same way. Even if we could come up with something more plausible than the tentative suggestions above, it would fail to account for the contours of actual ethical thought about our roles. When we appraise ourselves with regards to our roles, or when we think of others like my aunt, we are doing something more specific than comparing our comportment to a general standard. Instead, our reflective criticism is finely tuned to the particular contours of the role in question.

To consider an example: when I observe a student from my undergraduate years becoming ever more 'professionally' oriented towards being a graduate student of philosophy, compare his behaviour and attitudes to mine, and discuss this with my friends who are also graduate students, and question if this is appropriate, what I am doing is thinking very specifically about being a graduate student of philosophy and what attitudes one should direct to that way of behaving and thinking about oneself. Suppose I worry that this student's comportment towards this role has gone awry. In so doing I am concluding something that can only be communicated adequately to

someone with little knowledge of academic philosophy if I explain the institutional environment, the various pressures on a student, the values of the discipline, and so on. Many things have to be said to render my critique intelligible.

We often overlook these facts precisely because we have a very good implicit understanding of our own roles and because we rarely need to talk about lives of others that are so different from our own. Yet in pausing to think about how we appraise others and ourselves, we see that our thinking is nuanced. People appraise others all the time but we have to keep sight of the fact that these appraisals are richly textured. Just think of the ways in which a person might think about their husband, or children, in the context of an unfolding life. The same is true of the limited contexts in which we appraise someone's relationship to a particular role. Not only is it difficult to describe how a person stands towards a role but it is hard to evaluate whether this person is comported in the right kind of way. These complexities, and what it is we do in thinking about a role, show us that the normative aspects of our relatedness to them cannot be understood in terms of one or two relations.

If we comported ourselves towards our roles by relating to them in one of several ways, then our consideration of these roles would not be so specific. We could point out what is going awry with someone without having to expend much energy in also detailing the wider context. We shouldn't deny that we could draw analogies between various roles. I might aid you in understanding my worries about the professional minded student in this way. But to offer a robust and resilient critique, one that can lead you to think something has really gone wrong, more has to be said. That is the only way to avoid the charge that I am mistaken, quick to appraise, and generally narrow-minded.

The last point is a very real concern in the background of this thesis. Although I lack personal experience of parenting I often return to the example of being a parent. Awareness of my ignorance led me to extensively discuss my ideas with people who do have children. To frame a critique, or come to a reasonably settled view that a conclusion I draw from an example is one that I can advance with integrity meant these discussions about parenting had to be extremely detailed. They were necessarily complex due to my lack of personal experience. This observation supports my conclusion above. We should pause before we suggest that our relatedness to a specific role, like being a parent, can be accounted for in terms of a general relation (as the revised Korsgaardian view would have it). If we could do that, then my difficulties in thinking about the parental role would be less intelligible. I would be able to

understand attachment to the parental role by thinking about the other roles that require the same relatedness.

The second reason why we cannot specify our relatedness to a role independently of it is that this misconstrues something important about what constitutes a role. I claim that there is an internal connection between the normative aspects of our attachment to a role and that role itself. I understand, by “internal”, the idea that the norms, which render our attitudes towards a role open to evaluation, are themselves constitutive elements of that role.

This is markedly different from Korsgaard’s account. There, a role is constituted from the “normativity built right into” it that constrains behaviour. To render roles part of who we are, we appropriate them in a distinct identifying movement. Goffman’s account is similar in that his primary focus was the behavioural structure of a particular role. Attachment was regarded as secondary notion that detailed the attitudes we take towards this antecedent commitment or aspired commitment. We should avoid making a categorical distinction of this kind.

Instead, think of the norms of attachment as also being “built right into” the role in question. They are *part* of a role. Any form of social being, therefore, carries with it a normative interpretation of how the person assuming it should think and feel about it. Roles are constituted from more than behavioural norms. If this is plausible then it follows that it would be a mistake to attempt to characterise what an apt form of attachment to any role would be like. Someone’s attachment to a familial role will differ from how they relate to their job, for example. The forms of relatedness available to one in these cases are particular because the roles are.

My view should be distinguished from a similar alternative. You could agree that our role-attachment is a normative matter and can be the subject of ethical reflection. To accommodate this fact you might then agree that accounts like Korsgaard’s have overlooked some elements of a role. “They are too concerned with behaviour”, so the objection might go, and so far I would agree. Thus, an account of what a role is must add additional elements. Here, one plausible view, would say that roles also contain norms that guide aspects of our psychological life. A way of doing this would be to claim that roles have an emotional, or attitudinal, profile, and one that is subject to normative appraisal. Something like this view is to be found in the work of Arlie Hochschild who writes that,

A social role – such as that of bride, wife, or mother – is partly a way of describing what feelings people think are owed and are owing. A role establishes a baseline for what feelings seem appropriate to a certain series of events. When roles change, so do rules for how to feel and interpret events. (2003b; 74)

One way of understanding this passage is that Hochschild thinks that there is an important connection between what a role *is* and the normative contours of certain emotional reactions. For her, we become aware of these normative aspects of a role through reflection on our implicit convictions as to how we ought to feel.

How do we recognise a feeling rule? We do so by inspecting how we assess our feelings, how other people assess our emotional display, and by sanctions issuing from ourselves and from them [...] A call for account implies that emotional conventions are not in order and must be brought up to consciousness for repair -or, at least in the case of weak conventions, for a checkup. (2003b; 57)

Methodologically, Hochschild's approach resembles mine insofar as the possibility of criticism, sanction, and reflection stands as evidence of the existence of various norms. I also agree that roles have emotional contours. Hochschild terms these understandings "feeling rules". They range from the trivial: relief at the end of a final exam; to the more momentous: a sense of relief upon securing a job in philosophy or joy at one's wedding (2003b). These are contexts in which we ought to feel certain things. We are sensitive to them; the incongruous emotional reactions of others attract our attention and prompt concern.

These understandings are usually latent but we become aware of them in various reflective contexts. Asking, "Should I feel this way?" can be part of asking how to live. Questions of this kind might be posed to us by others, as when a friend attempts to reconcile our apparently miserable state of mind following an achievement by leading us to see that we have "no reason" to feel down. Or they might be posed by ourselves. The internal dynamism of our intimate relations with others is often constituted by questions of this kind: "Is my anger appropriate?" "Can I go on feeling like this?" "Should I continue with this relationship if I feel this way?" and so on. Later I shall return to some of the emotional aspects of attachment.

Hochschild's view allows us to consider a possible account of the normative aspects of a role that ultimately I want to avoid. These 'feeling rules' might be the additional element that our critic is looking for. Unhappy with the behaviour-oriented character of Korsgaard's and Goffman's views, she could argue that an extra element is required. "Roles are *also* constituted out of various norms that govern how we ought to feel" she might claim, "to make these roles ours we then have to identify with those norms also". This view expands the group of things that count as constitutive norms of a role. However, it does so whilst retaining the Korsgaardian notion that we have to relate ourselves to those norms with some kind of secondary move.

I resist this revised view. It retains the structural features of Korsgaard's view that have been critiqued above. Further, it might also fall foul of my concerns about the presence of explicit reflection about a role. Indeed, in expanding the content of a role it offers more opportunity for thought of this kind. As will become clearer, thought about a role is not necessarily unproblematic (§3). Thus if having a role involves *more* explicit 'identification' we have additional reasons to worry.

At this point, you have probably noticed that this account is problematic for another reason. Hochschild's idea that roles have normative emotional contours is oriented towards how we feel and behave with regards to a role in various *situations*; yet what about our relatedness to a role itself? Her account is silent on this matter. However, considering how to accommodate this focus into a similar account will enable me to make my own position clear.

We have to avoid the idea that we have to identify with the norms that constitute a role in order to be related to it in the right way. It is a mistake to maintain the gulf between the content of a role and then our relatedness to this constitutive content and suggest that the latter is normatively structured in a way that is independent of the former. Instead, we can adopt Hochschild's amendments and thus broaden our account of what constitutes a role; its normative structure guides thought and feeling as well as action. This view is congruent with the idea that roles constitute our self-conceptions.

But instead of then suggesting that there is a secondary move that needs to be made to allow us to account for the normative aspect of our relatedness to a role, we should think of the role as having a reflexive component; norms that guide the

relatedness of an individual to the role of which those norms are themselves important constitutive elements. On this picture, having a role is still to be guided by the norms and obligations that constitute it. Yet because some of these norms relate to the role itself, we are in a position to erase the stark distinction, made by Goffman and implicitly endorsed by Korsgaard, between observing a role's behavioural aspects and having attitudes about it. This is what I mean when I suggest that our relatedness to a role is to be understood as an "internal" aspect of the role itself. Having a role – being partly constituted by it – just is to be related to it.

If my account is plausible, and our relatedness to roles is guided by norms that are themselves part of the roles in question, then it follows that we cannot develop a unitary account of this relatedness. The normative profile of every role will differ, as will the possible modes of attachment to them. To understand how we might be appropriately attached to being a psychoanalyst, or mother, we have to think about what these roles involve in their particularity.

You still might think that the latent normative rules which guide how someone ought to feel in given situations qua a role, when combined with its behavioural norms, exhaust all there is to be said about a role. "There just is no sense to the idea that we ought to be attached to the role that is separate from the norms that guide emotion, thought and behaviour" someone might exclaim. It is important to consider a further reason why this thought is misplaced, namely, that it is unable to accommodate the fact that roles themselves can be the subject of critical thought. Adopting a reductionist position leaves us unable to account for the sense in which self-esteem, and our self-conception more widely, is informed by general facts about ourselves and the roles we have (whether problematically or not). Such esteem is often inflated by the fact that we *are* something, a teacher say, irrespective of the various forms of behaviour that being a teacher requires of us.

To return to the example of the distant aunt, you will recall that I suggested our sadness in the face of her attachment to this role was subject to justification. We can see, now, that what is happening in this case is that my aunt violates various implicit norms of attachment that are internal to her role. You might rejoin that there are *many* ways of being an aunt and that it is overly moralistic of me to claim that the individual in question is violating norms. This is a forceful worry. In saying that certain latent norms, internal to a conception of the role, are being violated, I do

not wish to deny that there is a lot of room for discussion.¹³ It might be the case that there is substantial room for argument about which kinds of attachment constitute apt relatedness to this role.

However, the very fact that this discussion is possible shows that there are significant ethical questions here. The account I have argued for, with an important place for internal norms of attachment, provides a framework around which to conduct this ethical inquiry. For what is at stake is whether her conception of what it is to be an aunt is correct; and whether the manner of her attachment to this conception is in tension with other important factors. We are thereby discussing attachment to a role. This discussion has to be highly particular. In her specific case, her saddening behaviour is caused by the fact that she fails to be related to the role in the right kind of way. Interestingly, this failure arises from her very stringent form of relatedness to a conception of 'the role'. What is more, our account of this failure arises from considering the role itself, not general forms of relatedness. As we shall see, apt forms of attachment can sometimes require the very absence of this kind of reflective relatedness to the role (§3).

The foregoing showed that our attachment to our roles is a matter of normative concern. This conclusion was examined from various angles as I argued for a particular understanding of these norms. I resisted various revised versions of Korsgaard's view: she cannot account for the particularity of our reflection about the roles that we have; and she presents us with a misleading account of what constitutes roles. My own account of the normative character of our relatedness to roles concluded that we should think of every role as being constituted from some reflexive norms that guide our relation to it.

4. Cognitive and Affective Attachment

In making one of the arguments above, I introduced Hochschild's idea that emotional norms might partly constitute roles. Likewise, in discussing attachment, Goffman distinguishes between its cognitive and affective aspects. We should consider this potential distinction and question how it is to be drawn; it is potentially significant because it would further pressurise Korsgaard's claim to have adequately characterised our relatedness to roles with the singular notion of identification.

¹³ Cf. Korsgaard, 2010; 21

Making this distinction allows us to note that the relatedness between a person and their roles encompasses their beliefs and thoughts *and* their emotional life. But we have to question how to understand Goffman's distinction here. On one reading of it he appears to beg the question against views that regard emotions as themselves cognitive in some way. If we think, like Nussbaum, (2001; 2004) or Solomon (2007) that emotions just are judgements about the world, or beliefs about what is of value, then it would be premature to suggest that attachment has two dimensions that should be subject to separate analysis.

Addressing the question as to whether emotions are cognitive would take me too far afield. However, the view that emotions are importantly related to our cognitive life is appealing. It allows us to make sense of the fact that our emotional life does seem subject to various normative demands. In a manner similar to Hochschild's suggestion, our emotions can be subject to forms of reflection and change. Furthermore, the idea that emotions are related to judgement, or are themselves judgements, makes sense of the connection between emotion and our experiences of value in the world. These themes relate nicely to my discussion of attachment, insofar I understand this as a form of relatedness to a role of some valence; a valence that might have an affective contour as Goffman himself suggested. In the remainder of this section I propose we retain Goffman's categories of the "affective" and "cognitive" aspects of attachment as points of reference, whilst remaining agnostic as to the substantive connections between emotion and cognition.

The rest of this section will briefly outline the differences between these points of reference and place them in the context of the discussion so far. I will approach this distinction from two angles, motivating it by suggesting that our thoughts and emotions can come apart with regards to our relatedness to a role. I am doing this because the rest of this thesis will be primarily concerned with "cognitive attachment", and because I think the normative aspects of this notion are initially less intuitive. These remarks are not in tension with my claim that the norms of role-relatedness are internal to a role. They will, however, inform my consideration of integration (§4).

Cognitive attachment

The example of depression motivates the distinction between cognitive and affective aspects of attachment.¹⁴ There are instances of depression where the person concerned can avow their attachment to a certain role that they have, whether it is their job or themselves as a parent. They endorse the norms of their role. Yet this might be despite their experience of a depressed mood, background feelings of worthlessness, or other forms of psychological agitation (DSM criteria for a major depressive disorder).¹⁵ Their statement of attachment tracks a reflective attitude towards their role. However in cases like this the individual concerned may be unable to be sufficiently motivated to act because they are unable to emotionally engage with the beliefs they avow. That is to say, they might experience a “markedly reduced interest and pleasure in most activities”¹⁶ whilst retaining clear beliefs about these activities and roles to which they are related. Their motivational clutch remains disengaged despite the presence of their endorsement of the role. Their lack of action can occasion self-criticism, especially when faced with the incongruity between valuing something, recognising the importance of that way of being, and the difficulty in translating such recognition into action. This gulf can affect the constitution of someone’s self-conception. This kind of self-critique further supports a loose distinction between cognitive and affective attachment. It points to the fact that a person can value themselves qua a role they have, the behavioural aspects of which remain partially unfulfilled due to their emotional disengagement.

Affective Attachment

In contrast to forms of cognitive attachment, which concern someone’s beliefs about a role, affective attachment is concerned with how someone feels about a role.¹⁷ Someone can be affectively attached to a role that they think is unimportant or repugnant. Alternatively, someone can be confused about a role to which they are committed. These ambivalences are common. Someone might suppress emotions about a role if they think it is in tension with other aspects of their life. For instance, someone might end up in a role they never desired. They longed to be, or do, something else, and oriented their life towards the attainment of that end. The clichéd image of an aspiring

¹⁴ Cf. Calhoun; 2008. Calhoun’s use of a similar example relies on Korsgaard’s notion of “identification” which I have already critiqued. I use the example to make a different point here.

¹⁵ Martian, 2006; 143.

¹⁶ DSM criteria two

¹⁷ Thus, insofar as we think that emotions are themselves cognitive the label ‘affective attachment’ will be misleading.

actor comes to mind. She enters into yet another job stating it is “only a stopgap”, that it is “banal”, and that she “doesn’t care about it at all”. It might be that she sincerely believes that the role is of little importance to her. She might think that she *should not* feel the way that she does; that part of what it is to be properly related to this part-time job is that she doesn’t find it emotionally satisfying. That would be a judgement about the norms that, in governing her attachment to the role, part-constitute it. However, these beliefs notwithstanding, the role can be an evident source of satisfaction to her and gives rise to valued emotions and feelings.

The example of the actor and person suffering from depression show that beliefs and emotions about a role might diverge. A significant form of divergence arises between the norms that partly constitute one’s attachment to the role and how one is actually attached. This is likely to impact upon a person’s flourishing because they are faced with a conception of what they should be feeling and the incongruities of their own emotional experience. These dissonances led to Hochschild’s plausible suggestion that roles also consist of emotional norms. Potential mismatches between someone’s affective attachment and how they think they ought to be attached can call into question their relatedness to the role and thereby impact on their life. This analysis might apply to the example of my aunt, whose conception of what she should be feeling characterises her relatedness to her role, and affects her behaviour in a manner that could be regarded, with good reason, as ultimately detrimental to her (insofar as it is detrimental to blind oneself to persons of value in your life).

I have suggested attachment can be understood in terms of both beliefs and emotions *if* the two are distinct. This potential distinction is most visible when these forms of attachment diverge; when people eschew or assume various roles, or when roles conflict. Experiencing the lack of agreement between what you think and believe about a role, and what you experience emotionally is familiar. Someone who has long lauded the value of a particular role they aspire towards can be betrayed by a noticeable lack of affective attachment to it once it is achieved. This can be seen when people long to be in a relationship, or to assume a profession. Disappointment is often predicated on experiencing this gap between one’s cognitive and affective attachment to a role. When our beliefs about the value of an anticipated way of being is not matched by a tangible sense of emotional engagement with, or about, it; one might just realise that, beliefs about a role’s value aside, one *just doesn’t feel right*.

Cognitive attachment and affective attachment are normatively guided ways of relating to a role. Thoughts and emotions qua roles are open to criticism. The depressed person can be critical of their inability to feel the right way about roles they value; the actor who disavows the value of a job that they are affectively attached to can be questioned by her friends. In my discussion of the general normative aspects of attachment the case for the normative aspects of affective attachment was made. This is because roles are partly constituted from norms that guide emotion (a view put forward by Hochschild). We can, therefore, be critical of someone who takes pleasure in an aspect of a role (generally) that ought to demand a sense of detachment, e.g. a riot-policeman who relishes the possibility of violent clashes with citizens and who enjoys this aspect of his role. We can call for an account of his attachment, here. Similarly, someone can be criticised for lacking affective attachment to a role. The character of this attachment can be tragic and have wide-ranging consequence when, for example, a parent or (purported) friend seem to have no real emotional relatedness to their role as such. Attachment in the affective sense can be a matter of degree, and someone might be more or less attached to a role and be aptly subject to concern as a consequence. Different roles will demand different degrees, and forms, of affective attachment.

The normative aspects of our relatedness to a role in thought, cognitive attachment, are less apparent. Yet we can err in thinking about ourselves in certain ways. This has already been noted in the example of the aspiring actor whose belief that they don't care about their job masks the fact they are emotionally attached to it. This case might be thought to have little relevance as we may think that nothing significant follows from this error. Yet this isn't so with regards to all roles. If a friend or lover lacked certain thoughts and beliefs about their role, or reflected on it in inappropriate contexts, this can have serious ramifications. To see this consider Bernard Williams' example of a man who encounters two drowning people; one he doesn't know, the other is his wife (1981). Williams appeals to the example to suggest that the man shouldn't have to have any thoughts about who to save other than the sole motivating one: "She's my wife!"

This example has been subject to much discussion. Harry Frankfurt makes an observation that strikes me as being true. He,

...cannot help wondering why the man should have even the one thought that it's his wife. Are we supposed to imagine that at first he didn't recognize her? Or are we supposed to imagine that at first he didn't remember that they were married, and had to remind himself of that? It seems to me that the strictly correct number of thoughts for

this man is zero. Surely the normal thing is that he sees what's happening in the water, and he jumps in to save his wife. Without thinking at all. In the circumstances that the example describes, any thought whatever is one thought too many. (2004; 36 fn2)

This remark pressurises the idea that there should be thinking in this situation at all because, as described, it is not a deliberative context. However, there is also something strange about the character of the man's thought as Williams outlines it. "She's my wife!" circumscribes the drowning woman with a term that can refer to one of her roles. As a consequence it is possible to imagine that this man is thinking about the imperilled woman qua his role as a husband. That is to say, the thought can be understood as cold and detached. To see this, consider the following three thoughts, each italicised to indicate emphasis of reflective intonation: firstly, "*She's my wife!*", secondly, "She's *my* wife!" and thirdly, "She's my *wife!*" It would be plausible to suggest that the second and third thoughts have the emphasis in the wrong place. The second due to its egoism (which I cannot discuss), the third due to its emphasis on the fact that the drowning woman is to be understood in terms of a general role description. That seems subtly pernicious. Thinking about someone in these terms will blind you to them in significant ways. Frankfurt raises a similar point when he questions whether this man loves the drowning woman and whether their relationship is flourishing or not. Merely noting that a person is someone else's wife tells us little more than that they stand in a certain legal relationship.

Much work is required to understand what is problematic about reflection of the kind we can glimpse in Williams' example. This thought doesn't appear to have immediate negative consequences; after all he saves his wife, but does reveal something about the character of the person who thinks in this way. It may also evidence that this person has a conception of their role that will impede their flourishing. I will undergo some of this work later (§3). Frankfurt's remark suggests, however, that *not thinking* about roles can be apt. This conclusion connects to the idea that the very nature of our attachment to particular roles can be called into question by the presence of certain kinds of thought. That is to say, at the limit, it might be a part of the normative aspect of a role that we don't think about what to do under the auspices of it. As I have argued these norms are themselves part of a role, it might be the case that part of a role is the absence of further reflection on it. It is to a more detailed investigation of this idea that I shall now turn.

SECTION THREE

- Reflecting on Roles -

Introduction

This section explores some complexities of attachment by examining how we relate to our roles in reflection. In particular, I consider specific ways in which role-oriented reflection can be problematic and lead to various ethically significant consequences. Two kinds of problem will be discussed. The first is that some roles might have a normative character such that thinking about them, in the context of action, defeats your claim to be related to those roles in the right way. The second is reification, a notion I shall explain in the context of some examples I have already introduced. Reification, I argue, gives rise to the particular ethical pathology of alienation

Recall that Korsgaard thinks, “temptation to resist the claims of our practical identities is possible. And *then* you might have thoughts that explicitly invoke your identities” (21) (§1). Korsgaard implies that this is the *only* context in which we might think about our practical identities; and that most of the time we don’t reflect about our roles. Only contexts of temptation make it necessary to consider what we are doing in role terms. Those situations are ones in which we stray towards neglecting a role’s norms. Good examples of this arise when someone faces competing demands; for instance between their job and being a friend. Korsgaard supposes that in some contexts of crisis we may think “I can’t do that, she’s my best friend!” (Ibid) People obviously can think like that, although the character of what they are doing is unclear. They seem to remind themselves of a fact about them and their friend: namely that they *are* friends. This realisation informs a reason to refrain from the tempting course of action.

Korsgaard’s remarks bear some relation to Williams’ imagined example of the man who is motivated to save his wife by the thought “She’s my wife!” Both philosophers seem to think that thoughts of these kinds are important, and can motivate us to act in times of difficulty. However, we should question whether thinking like this is always unproblematic. The Williams case is challenging in a variety of ways, including Frankfurt’s observation that there ought to be no deliberation at all in such a context. Indeed, as I shall argue, further such reflection may be pervasively pernicious

Is Korsgaard correct to suggest we only think about our roles in contexts of “temptation”? Empirically this seems false. It is intelligible to consider individuals who think about what they are doing, in ordinary situations, with reference to their roles. Someone can wonder what to do as a parent and ask, “What would the good parent do?” Politicians can question what their role demands of them. In such instances people are trying to work out what to do, or what is expected of them qua a role. Structurally, they oppose Korsgaard’s examples. For her, individuals have an implicitly clear idea about what to do which is temporarily obscured by their temptations to do otherwise. Thinking about the role in question reminds them what they already know. The mother and the politician however, might just lack knowledge of what their role demands. Korsgaard’s account of our relatedness to roles cannot accommodate these cases of aspiration or exploration. She relies on the case of the skilful agent who always knows what to do with regards to a role. I offered an argument (§1) to the conclusion that these cases are not paradigmatic; here we see that thinking that they are has led Korsgaard to overlook other contexts in which people might think about their roles.

Korsgaard’s empirical claim that we seldom think with reference to our roles is surprising if, as I argued, our roles provide us with ways of thinking about ourselves, and of finding ourselves estimable. We are often concerned about how we go about being friends, students, parents, psychoanalysts or whatever. These impersonal social categories have a personal valence for those who assume these roles in their particularity. Therefore we should not be surprised that people might think about them. The pressing question is how we can proceed to think about ourselves in this way without succumbing to pathologies of reflection. Korsgaard suggested we think about roles when we are tempted to neglect their various agential norms. But reflection of this kind can itself be a temptation. Just as some medicines harm as they cure, reflection that moves us to behave in a positive manner can be pernicious.

1. Self Defeating Reflection

The first form of problematic thought about our roles is related to Frankfurt’s suggestion that there can be some contexts in which we do not think about our roles. Reflecting about roles can be self-defeating.

Underlying this idea is the supposition that someone can engage in patterns of thought which undermine their claim to be what they take themselves to be. To grasp this, an analogy can be drawn between the structure of reflection on roles and of thought about some virtue-traits like kindness, or character-descriptions like being spontaneous. Deliberation about what compassion requires can, in particular contexts, be taken to undermine a person's claim to be compassionate if they act on the basis of this deliberation (and we know this). It calls their claim into question insofar as we suppose compassionate people don't deliberate about what compassion requires. Of course, most compassionate people will not themselves claim to be so. The same goes for a variety of descriptions of action.

The reason thinking this way is self-defeating is that the kind of person that these descriptions pick out is someone adept at skilful, practical, agency – for example, someone for whom compassionate or spontaneous action has become second nature, or for whom these notions describe robust traits of character. The characteristic behaviour of this person is in marked tension with someone who has to deliberate carefully about what to do. This difference of character means that we cannot predicate things that require the absence of deliberation, to an agent who reflects. The same is true from the first-personal point of view; the need to think about what to do can sometimes prevent someone from being a certain kind of person.

The same can be said of roles that are not associated with various forms of explicit thought or deliberation because engaging in such reflection is not a part of the normative elements of the role. In thinking, say, "I'll do that because that's what a psychoanalyst would do" one pressures one's claim really to be a psychoanalyst as it is characteristic of a psychoanalyst not to think like *that*. The normative profile of being a psychoanalyst holds that reflexive reflection in a deliberative context is absent. Instead of acting under the "conception of being a psychoanalyst" one should be attentive to the demands of the specific analysand, the particularity of their case, what they are communicating, and what they need.

In general, these kinds of thinking embroil people in various self-defeating trains of reasoning and reflection. They often occur in contexts where individuals are unclear about what to do, but have an idea of who they want to be. Structurally they are akin to the complexities inherent in "trying to be cool" where coolness involves the absence of conscious 'trying'; or "being eccentric" which requires the absence of any intentional attempts to achieve eccentricity. There is a close connection between cases of self-

defeating reflection and contexts in which people have prior aspirations to be something in particular.

The possibility of thought going awry in this manner relies on the fact that we can describe a role from a third-personal perspective. But a person who is committed to a role will deliberate on the basis of something richer, on the basis of the role's first-personal significance. Role descriptions serve a dual function of both denoting social categories and referring to part of a person's self-conception, a part that is also phenomenologically complex. Keeping sight of these elements of roles allows us to note the difference between a generic role term, and the significance that term can have for someone who deliberates. The risk that we'll undermine ourselves arises when our deliberation draws upon the way a role is regarded socially; if the role's third-personal profile is not mediated by the particular character of the reflection we undergo in virtue of the fact that a role is *ours*.

2. Reification

As in the Williams example, our reflection can go awry in various ways. Our reflection can assume certain patterns that can have problematic consequences and harm us. Many forms of reflective therapy and analysis are grounded on this premise. They look to address various schemas of reflection that impact upon someone's self-conception or impede their relationships with others. Even if we bracket pathological cases of neurosis, paranoia, anxiety, and compulsion, it is evident that how we think about ourselves and others has an impact on our lives and how we can conceive of ourselves.

For example, the process of writing this thesis might have made me think that a life of academic philosophy is the only valuable life I could possibly lead. As a consequence I may neglect those around me and eschew opportunities in order to write a better thesis and seek an academic job. I would be wrong to think like that, of course. What is more, you could show me that I am wrong. You might point to the billions of people who will never write a thesis in philosophy, let alone read Korsgaard, and gesture to the numerous other kinds of meaningful lives that have been led. You could also help me see the value in other extant areas of my current life. In doing this you will be showing me that my reflection is mistaken. Firstly, I equated a part of what was valuable in my life for the whole of what was valuable. Secondly, I was insufficiently attentive to the actual ways my life might go, and go well. What is *possibly* of value for me far outstrips

a life of academic philosophy. Although aimed at the particularities of my life, these mistakes have a generic form and they coalesce into patterns of thought that reappear in other aspects of my life. Indeed, I might be tempted to think like this; to hide behind an “all or nothing” attitude towards the world. Exposing these errors will go some way to stemming the tide of troublesome consequences that flow from them. Becoming sufficiently aware of them will lead me to take those opportunities, spend time with my friends, and pursue that relationship. My life will be better for it.

There is a species of mistake that we can make with regards to our roles. Just as with the “all or nothing” reflection above this error is made in very particular contexts but its character can be described in a variety of ways. In describing it we shall see that these patterns of thinking can lead to an ethical pathology. As with the seductions of “all or nothing” thought about the value of philosophy, in the above example, we can be tempted to think about our roles in particular ways. The reflective error that I will now turn to is reification.

Reification, the treatment of an abstraction as if it was a concrete thing, is a concept that appears in a variety of discourses. It is perhaps most familiar from the writings of Lukács (cf. Honneth; 2008) but it features in much Marxian thinking as well as in sociology (e.g. Simmel; 2005). Honneth charts various ways in which this notion is used, from the description of “an atmospheric mood” in literature through to its ethical interpretation in discussions of objectification, and as a notion used to describe the functioning of the mind itself (2008; 18-21). If one reifies something one is making a mistake. Whitehead termed this error the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (1997; 52) that is, “the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete”.

The epistemological character of this mistake is complex. In a Marxian guise its aetiology is social. *We* somehow come to regard various relations as objects in their own right. There are numerous ways of understanding this and Honneth provides an interesting yet ultimately flawed Heideggerian interpretation of reification as something “primordial” in which a “genuine form of praxis, in which humans take up an empathetic and engaged relationship to themselves and their surroundings” becomes “distorted” (2008; 27). I remain agnostic about whether it is possible for us to interpret reification in this sense. Some social interpretations seem better than others, and there is a big difference between thinking about group attitudes towards abstract financial commodities, for example, and the notion of ‘primordial praxis’. Instead we should think of reification prosaically; as a form of error that individuals can make.

For reification to constitute a mistake that someone might commit it must be possible for an individual to get things right, for unreified thought to be possible. One is mistaken only where there is the possibility of proceeding correctly. Social interpretations of this notion render this impossible because the error is attributed to a society, or group; reification is therefore ascribed to something social, and removed from the sphere of individual control. I will speak of reification as something that individuals can do.

As I understand it, reification has two facets. The first is when someone thinks of a relation, or a process, as an object and treats it as such. They may, for example, regard something that exists as a relation between individual, relative to various categories or systems of measurement, as a concrete property of a single individual. Intelligence might be an example of the latter, whilst labour might be an instance of the former. The second facet is well captured by Whitehead's phrase above. There, one mischaracterises the nature of something abstract or imprecise in thinking of it as well defined. These two facets can be combined and are often hard to distinguish from each other. Someone reifies something when they think about it in a manner that obscures its nature. Reification is an epistemological notion, a specific kind of mistake that we can make in our thinking akin to the conflation of a part with the whole that was mentioned in my example above. It is similar to the kind of mistake made by the parent who thinks loving ought to depend on the presence of certain qualities (§1). Thus the understanding of reification that follows is not inherently moralised. Reification is likely to have problematic consequences but the error itself is not inherently troublesome. We reify all the time; thinking about the world in terms of averages, forces, relations, and so on means that reification is commonplace. Roles can be thought of in a reificatory manner. To see this I shall discuss three examples. I then consider the pathologies that instances of reification can cause.

The first example concerns reification of a relationship of which one is a constitutive part. Many roles like being an aunt, or friend, require us to relate to others. These relations ground the roles that presuppose them. However, sometimes thought about a relationship can construe it as an object. Consider the case of a love-relationship between two individuals where the discourse of one or both partners ascends to a meta-level. It slides from talk about "you" to talk about "us"; from "I" to "we"; or to talk about "the relationship". Such shifts often signal forms of dissatisfaction and are related to alienation, which will be discussed below. In this example the *role* is not reified.

Thought about “a friendship” is reified thought but the object of concern is not with oneself qua the role of “being a friend”. The objects of reification differ; i.e. the friendship in one case, the role of being a friend in the other. In cases of the first kind, reification construes a relation between two or more people into something that is thought about as a thing itself. Furthermore, this form of reification can also be subject to degrees of misplaced concretisation, further complicating matters. Not only can one err in characterising a relationship in a manner only applicable to its relata, but the resulting mischaracterised object, “the relationship” can also more or less concretely specified.

Secondly, one can reify a role directly. My aunt reifies the role of being an aunt because she focuses on it as a concrete concern. Her manner of doing this also illustrates that she has lost sight of the fact that the role of being an aunt is only possible because of the relations in which she stands to others. Those others assume secondary importance for her. Instead, her attention is towards the role itself as if it was something determinate and inflexible, which betrays a misunderstanding of what it is she is engaged in. She acts in virtue of the role not in virtue of those the role is oriented toward.

Another instance of directly reifying a role is visible in some ways in which parents might think about themselves. Reference to this role might arise in deliberative contexts, especially when one is tentatively trying to work out what to do. Yet thinking about “being a parent” or “my role as a parent” deflects attention away from the particular character of what the role of parent involves. The demands of parenting cannot be defined in advance. This is not to suggest that the role is vague, but rather that its demands and significance are particular. It is a role whose first-personal character is not clearly visible when considered abstractly. People parent in innumerable situations; many of which are unexpected and lack a clear sense of “what is to be done”. It is a role that lacks characteristic contexts within which its main activities take place; unlike most jobs, for example. The ability to constantly reflect and adapt oneself to new situations and demands is integral to being a parent. As such, thought about what to do that takes place with reference to “my role as a parent” is reificatory; it regards the role with a misplaced concreteness. The person is acting as if the norms were not internal to the role (§2). Thinking like this need not be intentional. Indeed, it might be supported by some of the ways in which being a parent is discussed and written about in our culture. The myriad books on parenting seem to suggest that

there might be a gap between the role's social profile, and the realities that parents experience daily.

In this case, the mistake is not that someone thinks about what to do in reference to a role. Instead, it concerns the character of this reflection. A person might think that they have to do something because that "is what I ought to do as an...", or "that's certainly what a graduate would always do", or "I'm an academic, I must do that" etc. It is the unqualified nature of these claims, and their entailed commitment to a concrete conception of parenting, say, that constitutes reification. Suggesting that one can reify a role in this sense relies on the possibility of arguing that the role in question is not concrete. This argument will have to be given separately for each role.

Notice that the reification, here, arises due to *over*-concretisation of the role in question. I don't deny that dynamic roles have some determinate aspects. Rather, one commits the error of reification in exaggerating the degree of concreteness a certain role exhibits. This differs from the case of reifying a relation where the primary error was to mistake a relation for something with the nature of its relata. In that case, the thing in question is either regarded as a relation, or as an object.

A third kind of reification differs from the two cases above. In the case of reifying a relationship on which a role is based someone treats the relation as a thing; in the case of reifying a role, someone treats the role in an overly concrete manner. Yet there is another case, seen when we imagine a parent who thinks that their child is "what makes my life alright" thereby regarding their child as a determinate 'solution' to their life. They reify that which makes their role possible. They regard their child in an overly concrete manner. Someone might also reify the activities or point of their role, as when someone thinks that being a graduate tutor of philosophy requires a certain determinate attitude towards their students, thereby remaining inflexible in the face of alternative conceptions of how they might proceed. These forms of reificatory reflection, although similar in character to the previous case of parenting, differ from reification of the role, because one's thinking is about those or that who make the role possible and inform its general orientation.

These three kinds of reificatory thought are about roles or are related to their constitutive aspects. Their details differ but something similar underlies each form of reflection. Roles have social and personal emphases. Reification occurs when someone imports the social aspect of a role into their reflective stance at the expense of a role's

particularity. Role terms both pick out a general social category and inform our self-conceptions. Knowing that you are a father, for example, tells you that you are a member of a particular class on which certain expectations fall, and about which presuppositions can be made. Yet the significance of this role for you is likely to be highly particular, and informed from a variety of other directions such as your experiences with your own children and your use of the term as a means of referring to your father. Reification overlooks that role terms can be present in two different discourses. In reifying, someone regards oneself in the way that an armchair sociologist might. Talk of “the relationship”, “the friendship”, “nephews and nieces” and so on, will be etiolated insofar as someone intends to talk about particular individuals; just as statistical averages tell us little about any particular member of a group.

3. Alienation

Although the mistakes that I have characterised above are not ethical in themselves, they can lead to various conditions that are. The main one that I will discuss here is alienation.

Like reification, alienation is a complex and multi-faceted notion. It appears to range over a variety of different forms of experience and a multitude of analyses have been given. For example, we might focus on this idea as Marx¹⁸ did in his discussion of those who are removed from what they labour to produce and are thereby also distanced from their essence as human beings (Fromm; 2004) or as something undergone by a group, perhaps when separated from its origins after, or during, wartime or social upheaval.¹⁹ Alienation has also been thought about by Freud (2003) and others in terms of the uncanny.

The understanding of alienation that bears upon our discussion is informed by its near-synonym: the notion of *estrangement*. As with reification, so alienation can be understood prosaically; as a general state we can attribute to someone who is estranged from things of value in their life. In this regard, alienation is similar to the state that the fictional version of this author was experiencing in the example discussed above. Being alienated is always to be alienated from something else e.g. what one believes, desires,

¹⁸ A complication here is that Marxists typically regard reification as a species of alienation. These issues will not concern me. I want to think of these things as separate yet related phenomena that can be thought of independently of the Marxian usage.

¹⁹ Themes that abound in the fictional writings of Camus and Sartre.

or values. We can say of someone that they are alienated from their family, or from their affinity to a certain place, or from their childhood aspirations.

It is also possible to speak, more generally, of someone's alienation from their self. This latter idea captures the sense in which a person might be beholden to a self-conception that is not accurate. In its broad guise we might talk of someone who "stands at a distance from themselves". This nicely captures what I have in mind by alienation; it is a state in which someone is aloof from what they actually care about, or value. This phrase also captures something more pervasive than merely having a false belief about something in one's life, or about whom one is.

We have to be careful that we don't lose sight of the fact that alienation is a more complex state than being in error. The idea of estrangement seems to capture this; one has not simply lost sight of an aspect of what you value, as when someone, in the midst of a fantastic party thinks that a hedonistic lifestyle is actually what they want, only to realise at home that they actually enjoy subtler pursuits more. Instead, one is deeply lost from oneself.

To be a stranger to oneself in this respect requires one to assume a different guise, a coherent and detailed costume. For example, saying that you are alienated from your work, as opposed to merely mistaken about it, is to suggest that you are beholden to an alternative picture of yourself and your life, perhaps one in which work purports to have no value. Many aspects of your life are liable to accommodate the posture you assume towards your work. Work will be a "nodal point" (Freud; 2001) around which other forms of self-deception coalesce, until one's image of oneself has totally changed.

Someone who reifies a relationship of which they are a part starts to reflect about "the relationship". This reification can lead to alienation and a variety of other issues. In turn, being alienated impedes the flourishing of your life, and the lives of those to whom you relate. Alienation is problematic for several specific reasons.

Firstly, the person is likely to become alienated from the people who make the relationship possible. Adorno and Horkheimer memorably suggest that "all reification is a forgetting" (cited in Honneth, 2008; 17) and in this case the forgetting in question is forgetting of other individuals, of their interests, thoughts, feelings and values. Oneself can be forgotten also, insofar as one overlooks one's interests or desires. Considering a relation in concrete terms means that one overlooks the particularities of

the relata; after all the relationship isn't the subject of desires, expectations and interests. It has 'interests' only derivatively, or with metaphorical exertion. Therefore thought about it takes place at the exclusion of one's focus on the person who makes the relationship possible. These patterns of reflection are more than just a psychological disturbance that jolts someone's attention away from another person or distracts them. Thought about "the relationship" is an alternative mode of approaching a situation and replaces thinking about the other person.

Secondly, one is in danger of failing to confront the reasons that led one to reify in the first place. When reifying "the relationship" this might include: that one or other of the people involved was labouring under a mistaken conception of the other, themselves, or the latent normative profile of the relationship itself; or that their emotions and feelings have changed; or that external factors have rendered one person incapable of committing themselves in the right way, and so on. Thought about the relationship precludes thinking about these other things. Reification is in danger of halting reflection on the very trends and currents that might make relationships, and roles that are based on them, possible to begin with.

These factors also arise in other examples I have discussed; when someone thinks about their role in an overly concrete manner or reflects on those things towards which their role is oriented in this way. My aunt is alienated from people of value in her life because of her over-concrete conception of her role. As with the case above, this reification has led her to forget what is valuable. She is mistaken about how to go about being an aunt and this mistake has crystallized into a pervasive self-conception around which she orients her actions. When others attempt to suggest, tactfully, that perhaps approaching herself a little differently is more appropriate, she is inflexible and resistant. This resilience in the face of prolonged discussion about how to conceive of herself points towards a diagnosis of alienation. Instead of being simply in error, her role provides her with an alternative mode of comporting herself towards her family. In being estranged from those that make it possible, she wears the costume of the role. She is alienated *from* her relatives, and drawn *towards* a concretised conception of a social role.

In discussing parenting, I suggested that reification of roles and relations can be understood in terms of a certain emphasis on the social aspects of these things. This emphasis occurs at the expense of the particularity of any specific role, or situation. Reflection about what to do with regards to one's parental role, or "because one is a

parent”, can lead to alienation. Consequently, one is in danger of forgetting the particular needs of one’s child in a situation, or more problematically, of whom one’s child *is*, what they value, or care about.

It is important to re-emphasise that thinking about what to do “as a parent” isn’t just a psychological disturbance that distracts a person from the day-to-day aspects of caring for their children. Instead, it presents this person with a whole new way of reflecting and relating to their child. They relate to their child via the role. I suggested that the norms of how we relate to our roles cannot be specified independently of a particular role (§2). In the case of parenting it is plausible to suggest that these norms are not very clearly defined. To think that they are, that one can parent under the guise of this role, is the kind of nodal point around which an alienated life can revolve. One doesn’t just make a mistake. One begins to think and act under the auspices of a particular conception of oneself, and one’s child, that can be in marked tension with actual particularities.

This also occurs in the example of the parent who thinks that their child is what “makes their life alright”. There, the parent is liable to be alienated from themselves in a variety of ways. Firstly, they may be inattentive to the wide range of other things that are of possible value in their life. Secondly, in regarding their child as meeting this structural need within their life they assume an attitude towards their child that is too concrete and inflexible. This is problematic because as it mischaracterises what any child can be.

This claim might seem to be in tension with my appeal to Frankfurt’s ideas (§1) because you might argue that it is precisely regarding someone in this manner, and overturning the contingency of your link to them, that constitutes appropriate love. This is mistaken because neglecting the background contingencies of your relation to another, in one’s thinking about them, is what constitutes the reification here. This is not in tension with Frankfurt’s view. He focuses on the structure of what we *will*. Therefore, although we can discover that our love for a person structures how we live and act insofar as it effects what we can will, we should not let that fact dominate how we *think* about them. Indeed, Frankfurt helps us to see that love antecedes thought about someone in many cases. This claim is a theoretical one, which deepens our understanding of love. Yet to talk to a loved one as if you were reading *The Reasons of Love* would itself constitute a form of alienation. The terms in which we explain the

character of what we can will should not be the terms in which we think about those who bind our will.

Imagine what it would be like to be thought of by your parents “as making everything alright”. You might try and lead them to see that there is much else of value in their lives; that there are other aspects to who they are than being parents. Saying that does not detract from the significance and value of parenting. Instead, it suggests that reflection of that kind fails to do justice to the role in question because it places an undue pressure on you as the person upon whom the role rests. You are regarded as an instrument with a certain place in the life of another, rather than as a person whose life might take any number of forms. The latent danger accompanying this kind of thought is that you might be forgotten as a consequence.

Indeed, the patterns of thought in question entail the thesis that Frankfurt seeks to deny, namely, that our love of significant others takes certain qualities about them as its foundation (and thus our love is, in an important sense, contingent on the appreciation of these properties). Regarding someone as a ‘solution’ can be understood as regarding them as loveable because there is something about them, some property, that grounds this love (§1). Furthermore, the specific character of this mistake is problematic because the property that is salient in this example is an abstract one about the child’s place in a wider structure (the parent’s life). That is to say, the child is such that she “fits in place”. The parent is liable to become alienated from their child if this thinking is pervasive.

Furthermore, thinking in this way mischaracterises the kind of thing a life can be. To regard a life as something a particular individual can “solve” or “complete” it is to be beholden to a mistaken conception of what a life is. This conception neglects the fact that lives change and abound with multiplicity. Supposing lives can be completed entails that one implicitly denies the dynamic aspect of a life.²⁰ Our thinking, in these cases, goes awry because our thinking reifies those who make our roles possible. A person’s attachment to the role in question is inappropriate if they think like this. They may be alienated from themselves, and the complex particularities of a life, because reflecting in this way presents an alternative mode of thought about what it is to have a life.

²⁰ See Larmore; 2010 p.177-83, and Larmore; 2008.

Reification often has an exculpatory character. We can think about our roles, or about “the relationship”, to avoid facing challenging things, such as the feelings and thoughts of those close to us, or our own desires. Evasions of this kind need not be intentional but self-critical reflection might reveal them. Thinking, “I have to do this because I’m a parent” or “because of my job” etc. can comprise part of a *strategy* to evade responsibility for various facts that bear upon a situation. Reflection that appeals to a role term and emphasises the social aspect of it, and not its personal valence, can serve as a form of self-justification that blinds someone to the actual possibilities of action available in a context.

This is a corollary of my claim that our roles inform our self-conceptions. We might attempt to make reflection easier by appealing to roles considered in the abstract. The price of this will be an etiolated self-conception. This is closely connected to alienation but the two pathologies differ slightly. The latter is a matter of standing at a remove from one who actually thinks and cares about to comport oneself to various alternative conceptions of oneself. The former, however, might avoid this by simply not investing the self-conception with much detail at all. Consequently, one will be vulnerable to the clichés and schematic currents of reflection that abound in society. More problematically, one will be closed to many forms of particularity; to what being a father or aunt etc. is for you. The exculpatory aspects of reified reflection inhibit the living of an authentic life.

What is more, we might be *tempted* to think like this on a regular basis. Even if someone thinks like this to avoid a temptation to ignore the behavioural norms of one’s role (to return to Korsgaard’s idea), it is not clear that such resistance is itself appropriate. The ways in which thought and feeling about one’s role becomes explicit is itself a normative matter (§2). Thus not only is it a mistake for Korsgaard to suggest we only think about our roles in contexts of temptation but that line of argument misses the fact that we might be tempted to reflect on our roles in certain ways. To modify Williams’ example somewhat, we can now see that saving one’s imperilled wife because one thinks about one’s *marriage* is pernicious, even if such thought moves one to act. There is something wrong insofar as this kind of relationship forms the central motivating thought. It is reified, and if we knew that someone thought like this we would be compelled to raise questions about their character.

Ultimately, alienation and exculpation are problematic because they impede a flourishing life. One is isolated from things that are of value, and impoverished in the

attitudes that one takes towards oneself. Reifying relationships that ground one's roles, or reifying the objects towards which a role is oriented, can also alienate one from other people. As a consequence, their lives will be affected. If you are alienated from your children, or your friends, then the impact will be significant. The forgetting that is constitutive of reification leads to the creation of simulacra of comportment. The manner in which you are attached to your roles is no longer congruent with the reflexive norms that guide attachment to that role (§2). You will be an object to yourself insofar as you regard your roles and relationships as concrete things to be related to, reflected about, and hidden behind.

You may recall that I suggested that reification was a non-moralised mistake. Yet reification can lead to alienation, and alienation is more than merely making a mistake about some part of one's life. How, therefore, does reificatory thought about our roles lead to alienation? This is an important question. The link is one of degree. Alienation is founded on mistakes about oneself or one's life. The more reificatory moves we make, the more we err. These mistakes have a certain important character. They don't simply prevent us from thinking in the right way. They are not psychological disturbances, or distractions, that cause us to forget what is important for a moment. These currents of thought, for in the end we are talking about *patterns* of thought and not usually single instances, seem complete in themselves. They are alternative modes of relating to our roles and relationships.

This aspect of reification is akin to other interpretations of the concept. Moralised notions of reification derive their force from the thought that in reifying this or that, we (whether as individuals or a group) are presented with a completely alternative mode of experiencing the world. Honneth's appeal to reification, for example, gestures towards the idea that our reified form of life has replaced an ethically better empathetic way of relating to the world. Mere mistakes about what is the case operate *within* a particular mode of experiencing the world. Reification is problematic, then, because it presented us with an alternative paradigm of relating to ourselves: alienated life. Yet this only occurs after prolonged exposure, and sustained reificatory reflection. We can be more or less alienated from more or fewer aspects of our lives.

We should be careful to retain our prosaic reading of reification. Only then can we understand it as something befalling individuals. This has the consequence that alienation, despite its name and its range of historical usages, should be thought of as a common phenomenon. Yet, we can see that there is a similarity between this

understanding of alienation and the way Honneth understands reification. We should drop the anthropologically dubious premises of Honneth's arguments about primordial modes of experiencing the world but we can retain the thought that one problem with alienation is that it undermines the possibility of a fully engaged empathetic relation to those in your life. This is because one's reflection and thought is directed at things that have been characterised in the wrong way. Relations are mistaken for objects, and roles are over-concretised.

In summary, reification of roles, relations, and role-oriented objects, can lead to alienation. In turn, alienation precipitates forms of forgetting which undermine empathy and disrupt a flourishing life. This shows us that relating to our roles is not straightforward. Korsgaard's empirical claim that we only think of our roles in contexts of temptation is false. We can and do think about our roles in other contexts. Discussing reification and its pathologies supports the conclusion that how we are attached to our roles in thought is complex. Discussing self-undermining patterns of thought shows that thinking about roles can be self-defeating. Role-oriented reflection doesn't simply ward off temptations to violate the norms of a particular role, but it is a temptation that we must avoid in some contexts. Repeated reflection of this, reificatory kind, will see us alienated from our roles, and those that make them possible.

SECTION FOUR

- Ethical Demands -

Considering some of the possible pitfalls that shadow cognitive attachment to a role reinforced my conclusion that our relatedness to a role has a multifaceted normative character (§2). In this final section I will consider the outstanding question as to whether we have to integrate our roles in the light of my previous conclusions.

I. Integration

Do any ethical demands on an individual arise as a consequence of having many roles? (§1) Korsgaard suggests that there are; that we have to “work” to “pull ourselves together” into a “coherent whole”. It will be clear from reading the quotations of Korsgaard’s work on integration that it is subject to a great deal of ambiguity. There are many ways of fleshing out the idea of integration in the context of roles. For example, we might question whether we have to somehow blend these roles into a single overarching identity under which we can act (at one point Korsgaard talks of “a single practical identity”). Alternatively we might wonder whether what is important is organising our roles so that they are coherently organised (in their multiplicity) and not in conflict (Korsgaard also speaks of a “coherent life”). I lack the space to consider all possible interpretations of integration. Korsgaard’s work, from which we begin, is also of little help as she does not consider the idea in any detail. My remarks are thereby based on what I’ve discussed above.

I have argued several things that relate to the question of integration: that relating to roles is a diverse and complex process; that we cannot develop a single account of this relatedness; and that reflection on roles can sometimes be problematic. These points gesture towards scepticism about the whole idea that there is an ethical requirement to integrate our roles. I share this scepticism with regards *both* to the idea that we need to develop a clear and unified identity *and* to the thought that our roles must be coherently organised into a wider life. Internal to these views is the supposition that we ought to undergo ‘work’ on ourselves over time in order to attain a certain structural end. They rely on intuitions that unity is *prima facie* better than disunity. I cannot address this latter claim here. It suffices to say that I don’t share this intuition when

expressed in this way.²¹ The former idea, that we have to work on ourselves with a structural goal in mind, I will challenge below.

I suggested that Korsgaard's view of integration relies on the presupposition that roles are stable objects that could be the subject of integrative work (§1). I now ought to honour that promissory note on the theme of fragility. The counter-claim is simple: acting under the auspices of a role is a complex process. This is partly because we can go astray in how we behave; a point that Korsgaard's view can accommodate. But I developed this idea to conclude that our relatedness to a role is itself a nuanced normative matter. How we ought to relate to a role is internal to that role, it partly constitutes it. There are various ways in which the character of our reflection about a role might jeopardise our flourishing. That point will be the subject of a separate concern about the notion of integration below. For now I want to emphasise that we have arrived at a conception of roles that differs from that to which Korsgaard and others appealed to.

If we could understand how we assume roles by appealing to a singular notion of "identification", then it might be the case that roles are solid enough things to be the subject of integration. In other words, if having a role simply requires we identify with it, and nothing more, our efforts can be directed to organising these roles together. I argued, however, that our relatedness to every role is complex and different, thus we have to reject the view that makes integration initially attractive. The very process of maintaining each and every role that we have, whether they are robust in the face of thought about them or not, is ongoing which means we cannot manipulate our roles into a whole, for they are never finalised and thus in a position to be so handled. I do not deny that people can prioritise roles or that they face contexts of conflict in which the demands of their roles clash. Yet, we have to heed the fact that there is a sense in which we can always be *trying to be* the role in question. That relatedness is complex and demanding, and that we have to understand how we go about being each and every role that we have in particular terms, mean that a certain picture of integration is untenable.

You might object here and say "The line of thought above is only a successful critique if we presuppose that the process of integration works only on stable elements. But we can question that idea, and the metaphors that sustain it." These charges are pressing.

²¹ Cf. Proust's narrator: "I was delighted by the multiplicity that I saw in my life" (cited in Landy, 2003; 453)

My response to the first is flatfooted: a lot of people *do* make this assumption. The way that Korsgaard writes about roles suggests that she does. Yet the objection demands a more detailed response. It implies that appeals to the fragility of roles function as a good objection only if we presuppose that roles must be stable. Yet this presupposition might be false.

My response to that worry does not reject the objection outright but rephrases the initial concern conditionally. If the process of integration requires that its subject matter is stable and unchanging, then we don't have reason to believe that roles will be sufficiently stable. Sections two and three can be read as an argument for that claim; that our roles are varied and normatively complex and that many cannot be circumscribed concretely. Korsgaard errs in implicitly understanding roles as things that can *obviously* be the subject of integrative activity. My first objection challenges the idea that this is obvious. However, further argument might show that we can talk about the integration of dynamic and complex things. A critique of the integration of roles would thus have to look elsewhere; it is to that task I now turn.

We should challenge the thought that integrating roles is an important ethical task. Is it unproblematic to think roles can be the subject of reflection about integration? The ethical 'work' of integration is primarily a reflective task; we question ourselves about what we are like currently, what our roles are, and who we want to be. Such reflection features within various deliberative junctures where potential courses of action are considered in more schematic terms. Then we reflect on *both* the local consequences of a course of action qua a role *and* how this relates to the background ethical issue of the connection between our self-conception and our roles. Certain kinds of thought about a role can be problematic (§3). That conclusion can be extended to the question of integration. Two points can be made here.

Firstly, some roles are such that deliberation about what to do in reference to them calls into question a person's claim to have them in the first place (§3). Thus if reflection about what to do refers to a role in order to accommodate the background concern with integration, then we might be drawn into a context which undermines some of the roles that are purportedly being integrated. If local deliberations are accompanied by global integrative concerns it is possible that someone will increasingly come to think about what to do qua their role. In the case of some roles, as I have argued above, this kind of reflection is problematic because it is reifies, thus challenging the aptness of one's attachment to the role. This concern is limited; it only bears upon

what might happen if our reflective contexts – i.e. the number of ways under which we think about a possible course of action - are broadened.

In contrast to the worry that integrative reflection might be an instrumental cause of reificatory reflection about our roles we can ask whether certain roles, like being a parent, should be the subject of integrative thought at all? The answer is no. Thinking that the role of being a parent is such that it can feature as the subject of reflection about the wider integration of roles is to make a further misunderstanding about what this role demands; there is a danger that one will think of parenting as something that can be the subject of structural demands. This inadvertently reifies and concretises the role (§3). It thereby negates the particularity of the role and exposes someone to alienation.

This line of argument resembles the argument made when discussing the parental example above. I suggested that thinking about one's child as a "solution" misconceives what a child can be in the context of ethical thought. As a consequence of this pattern of reflection someone is liable to be alienated from their child. Here, I make an analogous claim about the idea that the parental role ought to be the subject of a wider ethical integrative effort. Thinking that certain roles can be the subject of integrative reflection about them, reifies them.

It is internal to certain roles that they are not possible subjects of reflection (§3). Roles are resilient, to differing degrees, in the face of reflexive thought about them. One particular kind of reflection about a role is about how it might be 'worked upon' and situated in a broader context. Some roles are not resilient in the face of *this* kind of reflection. This conclusion has to be substantiated with a separate argument for each role to be consistent with my conclusion that we cannot give a general account of the normative character of our relatedness to roles (§2). Yet the foregoing remarks on the subject of parenting provide a possible candidate for a role of this kind of role. Another candidate might be that of being a friend to someone. It could be argued that in both cases, thinking that one ought to reflect on how to sculpt these roles into some broader whole, means that one is not attached to the role in the right way. One's friends and children are the possible subjects of deliberative reflection qua these roles. The role itself doesn't seem to have the same status: thinking about *it* in the wrong way can call into question your claim to *be* it. Certain kinds of thought about the integration of roles in general, that include being a parent or friend, present serious challenges to one's claim to be either of those roles.

Integration can involve reification, and if that is so, the reflection internal to integration might itself constitute a challenge to the very having of the purported subjects of integration: our roles. If this is plausible, then the process of working on these elements of ourselves might place them at a distance from us (we are no longer attached to them in the right way). Korsgaard's integrator, no matter how sincere, risks ending up akin to the estranged aunt; beholden to a conception that blinds her to the demands of what the focus of that conception is. The process of sculpting the self risks destroying the material that makes this artistry possible. Such is the complexity of our relatedness to our roles.

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