

## The Good in Articulation: Describing the Co-Constitution of Self, Practice, and Value

Carlota Salvador Megias / Nov. 2018

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There exists a curious tension between philosophers of friendship working in the Aristotelian tradition, on the one hand, and neo-Aristotelian/neo-Wittgensteinian ethicists in the vein of Martha Nussbaum and Cora Diamond, on the other.

The former have developed a virtue ethical conception of friendship wherein the value of friendship, as a practice, and the value of particular friendships within the life of any given individual, are each subordinated to the *ur*-value of individual flourishing<sup>1</sup> -- that is, the degree to which friends contribute to the development of each other's virtue, be it in the pursuit of one's life plans (i.e., one's autonomy) or in the formation of good character.<sup>2</sup>

The latter, meanwhile, extract from Aristotle a notion of the "noncommensurability of valuable things;" an injunction to attend to the "particulars" of what demands one's attention --

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<sup>1</sup> See Bennett Helm's introduction and discussion ("Nature of Friends") in his article "Friendship" from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta.

<sup>2</sup> See John M. Cooper's "Aristotle on Friendship" in *Essays on Aristotle's Friendship*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and Nancy Sherman's "Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47 (4; 1987), 589 - 613 for examples of this reading.

ex., a challenging text, a conflict with a friend, a dissenting opinion; and a place within ethical reasoning for emotion and for circumstances beyond one's control.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these honor in our relations a "particularity" ... "that could not even in principle give rise to a universal principle, since what is ethically important ... is to treat the friend as a unique nonreplaceable being, a being not like anyone else in the world."<sup>4</sup>

I take this tension to be one of philosophical style. The first conception approaches Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as one that would hold across historical periods and cultures, and from it derives 1) a taxonomy of friendships within a society, according to their purpose (pleasure, utility, or virtue);<sup>5</sup> 2) a ranking of more and less valuable friendships, with so-called "virtue friendships" topping the hierarchy;<sup>6</sup> and 3) a rationalist-instrumentalist conception of self and value undergirding this framework. Its philosophical purpose is prescriptive, and the questions that arise from it -- ones inquiring after the justification of particular friendships in light of what justifies friendship as a social practice -- aim at a definitive description of friendship's value as a social and personal good from within a virtue ethicist perspective.

The second style would rather encourage one approach the same text as a presentation of friendship at a particular time and place -- that is, within Aristotle's community. Despite deriving the same three "pieces" I list above, their purpose is *descriptive*, not prescriptive. Their adequacy

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<sup>3</sup> See Martha Nussbaum's "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature" in *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36 - 44.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 72 - 73.

<sup>5</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, Part 3, trans. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, Part 4, trans. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For elaboration, see the paper I cited by Cooper in Footnote 2 and Helm's "Friendship" article, cited in Footnote 1.

turns not on the degree to which they serve one's ethical viewpoint of choice, but on the degree to which they do justice to the practice of friendship as it is actually lived and understood by its participants. In so doing, one reads this portion of Aristotle's text less as a work of prescriptive ethical philosophy and more as a work of philosophical anthropology -- understood here to mean a work the purpose of which is to capture the relations between self, other, and socioculture, and the values that emerge from these.<sup>7</sup>

We might say that the first style represents a top-to-bottom approach to ethics and the second a bottom-to-top one. The first starts with a value that it sees as frustrated or fulfilled by social practice; the second moves from the articulation of social practice to the values these practices frame. In what follows, I will argue that the second approach is descriptively *and* prescriptively superior when what's at issue is the status of a social practice like friendship.

It is descriptively superior for three reasons. First, it gives one the latitude to recognize and philosophize about relationships that tend to fall out of contemporary accounts of love and friendship as these are actually lived -- ranging from friendships with and between very young children (who are not yet capable of rational autonomy) and very old adults (some of whom have lost their capacity for rational autonomy); to some friendships with and between non-neurotypical persons, persons with physical disabilities, and persons with mental illnesses and mood disorders, all of which are sometimes incompatible with philosophical ideas of rational autonomy and individual flourishing;<sup>8</sup> to friendships between institutional non-equals, such as

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Nussbaum's "reading strategies" in Part D ("Form as Content: Diagnostic Questions") of "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature" in *Love's Knowledge*, 30 - 35.

<sup>8</sup> This is a very rich area in its own right. For an example of how these discussions tend to proceed, see J. David Velleman's "Love as a Moral Emotion" in *Ethics* 109 (2; 1999), 338 - 374, and Jeanette Kennett's response, "True and Proper Selves: Velleman on Love" in *Ethics* 118 (2008), 213 - 227.

teachers and students; to friendships with and between non-human animals, such as pets and livestock -- even plants.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the descriptions and ensuing questions such an approach produces are truer to lived experiences of friendship, and more alive to the problems that can make or break friendships, than the descriptions and questions that otherwise tend to preoccupy this subfield -- that is, abstracted definitions of what a friendship is generated from lists of relationships, theories about interpersonal relations, or thought experiments; and questions that serve only to mystify friendship's existence as a social practice and the competencies that form part of such a practice -- most famously, regarding one's justification for terminating or continuing a particular friendship and the justification of friendship as a social practice in general.<sup>10</sup>

Third -- and what will form the bulk of this paper -- this approach articulates and depends upon a picture of the relation between self, other, and social practice that understands these to be mutually co-constituted; a picture one finds at the intersection of neo-Aristotelian and neo-Wittgensteinian writers' works on the relationship between ethics and the philosophy of mind that is at the heart of the question, *How do we -- and should we -- come to articulate ourselves to each other?* Indeed, the paper defends this position and the importance of this question by self-consciously adopting it in its philosophical examination and usage of anthropological-historical studies like Fernando Santos-Granero's "Of Fear and Friendship:

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<sup>9</sup> See Cora Diamond's "Experimenting on Animals: A Problem in Ethics" in *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991) and Fernando Santos-Granero's "Of Fear and Friendship: Amazonian Sociality Beyond Kinship and Affinity" in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (1; 2007), 1 - 18 (in particular, p.7).

<sup>10</sup> For an overview and discussion, see section 2 ("Value and Justification of Friendship") in Helm's "Friendship," cited in Footnote 1, as well as his related discussion in section 6 ("Value and Justification of Love") of his article "Love" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta.

Amazonian Socialty Beyond Kinship and Affinity” and Martha Vicinus’ “Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships” -- studies that would not do justice to their subject matter were they instead guided by the philosophical approach to friendship I critique.

Finally, this approach is prescriptively superior because it respects one of the most basic norms of friendship -- that is, a friendship and a friend’s irreducible particularity to oneself -- without having to provide a self-defeatingly instrumentalist (i.e., by my friend’s contribution to my flourishing) or reductionist (i.e., in terms of my friend’s properties or our shared history) argument for it. There is no justifying friendship as a social practice; and there is no philosophical answer to the question of what justifies a particular friendship that could be generalized beyond the specific situation that called for one to justify her decision to continue or terminate it -- that is a *personal* matter. The account’s prescriptive superiority lies in the manner in which it sets aside these concerns and substitutes in their place questions about the structures by which people come together in a given community;<sup>11</sup> the reasons they are taught to give and to accept, reject, or find incomprehensible for what counts as betrayal, slight, abuse, or tragedy; the means by which they articulate themselves, in word and deed; and the values they hold and are responsible for in light of these -- values to be tweaked, changed, or outright revolutionized

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<sup>11</sup> By “structures” I mean what we in the West would consider to be robust institutions, such as that of marriage, the family, school, and the workplace; more “informal” relationships without (or with much less of) a legal status, such as best friends, groups of friends, and roommates; the technologies by which we approach others, inclusive of social networking websites and platforms (ex., forums, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Tinder); and the very layout of a city or town and what it offers.

only by individual reflection and initiative within particular relations.<sup>12</sup> It is philosophy's job to facilitate this reflection.

Familiar caveats about moral relativism apply. This paper should not be read as one that could excuse any social practice that purports to have a value at the same that it denies personhood to any of its participants, such as slavery.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than elaborating each of the reasons I've provided for this approach's superiority in turn, I will proceed by fleshing out the third reason -- that of the co-constitution of self, other, and social practice -- in light of the role the lattermost plays in John McDowell's picture of self-development and -recognition -- the combination of which I will shorthand as *self-articulation*.

This is a picture that is congenial to, and bears resonances with, Martha Nussbaum's vision of neo-Aristotelian ethics and Cora Diamond's meta-ethical claims and ethical method;<sup>14</sup> and it is one I will ease the reader into by way of the anthropological-historical studies I mentioned earlier. In so doing, I hope that the reader will see how the first two reasons I gave for this approach's descriptive superiority -- of the relationships it can recognize and thereby philosophize about; of the utility and richness of the descriptions and questions it produces about

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<sup>12</sup> On this point, see David Cerbone's (as yet unpublished) essays, "Ground, Background, and Rough Ground: Dreyfus, Wittgenstein, and Phenomenology" <<https://cfs.ku.dk/summer-school-2017/background-readings/Cerbone-TEXT-FecklessPrisoners.pdf>> and "Feckless Prisoners of Their Times -- Historicism and Moral Reflection" <[https://cfs.ku.dk/summer-school-2017/background-readings/Cerbone\\_TEXT-Background\\_JuneDraft\\_.pdf](https://cfs.ku.dk/summer-school-2017/background-readings/Cerbone_TEXT-Background_JuneDraft_.pdf)>, part of the 2017 curriculum for the University of Copenhagen's Summer School in Phenomenology.

<sup>13</sup> This should not be read as the denial of any thoroughgoing *description* of slavery and the values it purports to have, which would be encouraged on this approach as a means of understanding *why* it is wrong.

<sup>14</sup> In particular, that articulation is itself a good. For elaboration of this point, please refer to Diamond's "Losing Your Concepts" in *Ethics* 98 (January 1988), 255 - 277.

social practice -- demonstrate themselves. I will return to the final reason regarding its prescriptive superiority at the paper's conclusion.

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Towards the end of an unpublished draft of "Truth in Ethics -- Williams and Wiggins" in her upcoming *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics*, Diamond describes what she calls an "Anscombian-Aristotelian but not entirely un-Wittgensteinian" approach to making sense of moral debates wherein which two sides genuinely disagree with each other at the same time that they deny their opponents have a genuine -- that is, sensical -- point of view.<sup>15</sup>

The development of this point is useful for introducing the relationship between ethics and philosophy of mind as it's found in McDowell's work and that is at the heart of what I've called 'self-articulation' -- all notions that can trace their origin to Iris Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good*, which claims that the style of thought and quality of attention we bring to the lives of others and our shared circumstances are as much a part of our ethical decision-making and behavior as the acts themselves.<sup>16</sup> Paying attention and thinking well are the individual's prerogative, sure; but what draws one's attention and bounds one's thinking?

Murdoch and Diamond alike are concerned with the objective validity of one's perceptions and judgments; but where the former subscribes to a Platonist conception of the good, the latter veers -- like Nussbaum -- in an Aristotelian direction -- that is, one concerned with the *truth* of one's beliefs that does not, at the same time, go beyond what's behind belief formation.<sup>17</sup> To that end, she distills from Wiggins' Wittgenstein "the idea of procedures that

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<sup>15</sup> Diamond, "Truth in Ethics: Williams and Wiggins," 18. I cite the as-yet-unpublished draft.

<sup>16</sup> See, in particular, "The Idea of Perfection" in her *Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Diamond, "Truth in Ethics," 19. This anticipates Nussbaum's own conception of objectivity, which I will mention in conjunction with McDowell's later.

guide our conceptions;” procedures we develop in “a cumulative process [and] through which we construct a form of life, [inclusive of an understanding of] what is and isn’t rational” such that statements like “all men are created equal” ... “come to be understood as ... standing [rebukes] to justifications of slavery.”<sup>18</sup> What she (and Wiggins) mean by “form of life” here is not to be understood as “a theoretical picture” about the conditions that must obtain for there to be genuine moral conflict.<sup>19</sup> Rather, there are -- relative to a form of life, but not such that what it means to do justice to oneself or to others is itself relativized -- “guides to right thinking” (like the statement I mentioned before) and “failed thought” (like pro-slavery arguments).<sup>20</sup>

I mentioned having argued in an earlier paper that the coherence of this position depends upon a minimal conception of personhood irrespective of one’s sociocultural scaffolding that would ground, ex., what it means to do justice to another person -- in the form of accepting a victim’s testimony of their own pain *as just such an articulation* of pain, say.<sup>21</sup> What I want to do now is to move away from this minimal conception of personhood to the self that emerges from one’s development within, and interaction with, the resources of her own society and culture. *How* does one articulate oneself and come to know others? Or -- to put it in slightly more McDowellian/Cavellian terms -- *how* do we disclose our selves and recognize each other?

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<sup>18</sup> Diamond, “Truth in Ethics,” 17 - 18.

<sup>19</sup> Diamond, “Truth in Ethics,” 18.

<sup>20</sup> Diamond, “Truth in Ethics,” 19.

<sup>21</sup> As I wrote then, “Diamond’s ethics would amount to a defense of a minimally substantive, sustainable conception of value that is of a piece with its description of what it is to be human -- what it is to be raised within a socioculture and to participate in its practices. It would invite us to conceive of certain absurdities -- certain alienations -- that are now at risk of being seen as mere provisions of particular conceptions of the good as antithetical to morality, or to the good itself.” (19 - 20)

We can answer these questions in two ways: One, by describing the scenes and tools of self-disclosure and -recognition -- that is, of self-articulation -- within particular societies at a given time and place, and with respect to particular cases; and another, by making more general comments about the co-constitution of self and practice.

Both are philosophical. The thrust of the first is less easy to see, so I will begin with it, especially since the second becomes easier to understand in light of its example. It has a pedigree I have alluded to already: In a clear development from Murdoch, Nussbaum advocates for the singular utility of the novel as a demonstration of one (of a world of possible) way(s) of going about the attempt of doing justice to another person and to one's relation to them in light of one's circumstances,<sup>22</sup> calling novels an "optical instrument" by which the reader is invited to imagine, reflect, and feel in the course of grasping the whole of the text on the terms it provides -- that is, its style.<sup>23</sup> Stanley Cavell adopts this approach in the presentation of his reading of *King Lear* in "The Avoidance of Love," a work in the vein of what he calls "philosophical criticism" -- the point of which is to "[bring] the world of a particular work to consciousness of itself" via description.<sup>24</sup> And Diamond depends upon it in characterizing the disagreement between those who would accept animal experimentation and those who would not as one of the "compartmentalization" of the individual's imagination, such that it is the analogies we make

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<sup>22</sup> See, in particular, Nussbaum's "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination" in *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1990). Diamond makes a similar point from her own reading of Murdoch in "Losing Your Concepts," 261.

<sup>23</sup> Nussbaum, "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature," 47. She is quoting Proust. Earlier in the paper, she writes: "Life is never simply presented by a text; it is always represented as something. This 'as' can, and must, be seen not only in the paraphrasable content, but also in the style, which itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up, in the reader, certain activities and transactions rather than others." Provocatively, Nussbaum likens the reader-text relationship to that of a friendship in "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality," 88.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*" in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) 333, Footnote 26.

about animals -- as “delicate instruments” or as “persons with moral claims” -- that tell us what, or whether, animal experimentation is permissible, via descriptions of the social practices (medical science, pet raising) that value what is different about humans and non-human animals in distinct (and, on the positions she criticizes, fundamentally contradictory) ways.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the place where this approach to the question of self-articulation is most at home is in anthropological-historical study. Consider, first, a society and culture much unlike the one you come from, assuming you are (as I am) an academic -- if not born and raised in the West, then influenced by the inescapable ubiquity of Western intellectual history on contemporary academia. I’m thinking of the description of Amazonian sociality in Santos-Granero’s “Of Fear and Friendship,” which seeks to modify what has become a dualistic paradigm of Amerindian social life -- between “kinship and affinity,” on the one hand, and “conviviality and predation,” on the other -- by investigating an “interstitial” set of relations this paradigm does not usefully accommodate -- that is, “relationships between non-kin that are phrased in the idiom of friendship,” or, more narrowly, “the formalized personal friendships that are established with enemy peoples.”<sup>26</sup>

Santos-Granero’s aim in this article is to distinguish formalized personal friendships as a distinct type of relationship, with a distinct kind of value, from kin and affines within Amerindian social life -- against those who would understand these to be “para-kinship relationships” on the dominant paradigm.<sup>27</sup> He accomplishes this by describing some common relationship types in the Amazons: Trading relationships between “socially and geographically

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<sup>25</sup> Diamond, “Experimenting on Animals: A Problem in Ethics,” 346, 351, 355.

<sup>26</sup> Santos-Granero, 1- 2. Please note I take the anthropological terminology, and his framing of this paradigm, for granted for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>27</sup> Santos-Granero, 13 - 15.

distant,” “unrelated” men who co-establish unique, robust friendships with each other for different purposes, depending on the tribe -- ones whose obligations “[exceed] those existing between cosanguines” or “provide a legitimate non-kin, non-enemy identity” to tribal strangers;<sup>28</sup> shamanic alliances -- mentorship networks spanning geographical and generational distances that enhance the power, security, knowledge, and dexterity of their constituents, with “rights and duties” distinct from those among kin and affines;<sup>29</sup> and some mystical associations between shamans and otherworldly beings, with whom shamans engage in practices of friendship -- “[hunting] together and [decorating] each other,” “[eating] and [drinking]” together, “making them gifts” -- and, in exchange, enjoy greater supernatural power.<sup>30</sup> By “[exploring] the social situations in which particular forms of friendship develop” -- something to which philosophical and sociological research alike are resistant, he notes -- Santos-Granero is able to 1) pinpoint a category of social relations and practices that are neither co-extensive with nor subordinate to kinship within the literature on Amazonian peoples; 2) carve out a specific purpose for these social relations and practices relative to the whole landscape of sociality in the Amazons -- that is, these formalized personal friendships “emerge [within]” -- and transform -- “contexts of great fear of (potentially) dangerous others;” and 3) show that such friendship “structures and encompasses” kinship in certain Amazonian societies, instituting relationships that would not otherwise be possible -- *or* recognizable on the paradigm he criticizes.<sup>31</sup>

The picture of friendship Santos-Granero draws from his descriptions of Amerindian social life doesn’t just go beyond the existing anthropological literature about Amazon sociality;

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<sup>28</sup> Santos-Granero, 3 - 5.

<sup>29</sup> Santos-Granero, 5 - 6.

<sup>30</sup> Santos-Granero, 6 - 8.

<sup>31</sup> Santos-Granero, 11, 14 - 15.

it bears fruitful resonances and tensions with the philosophical and greater anthropological literature about friendship to which he compares his own findings, and would not be derivable from these.<sup>32</sup> This was work he was able to do -- work that set aside or qualified what would have otherwise been useless or confounding presuppositions about friendship in philosophy and anthropology -- in virtue of an attention that was at once holistically-minded (with respect to the whole organization of Amerindian society) and keenly detailed (with respect to the circumstantial significance of specific practices). To summarize in my own language: The formalized personal friendships this technique led Santos-Granero to see are a scene of self-development and -recognition -- of self-articulation -- unique to the sociocultural landscape of the Amazons; and if one wants to do justice to this landscape, one will have to consider *it* the authority -- *it* is what determines the salience of antecedent theories of value and accounts of practice, be they philosophical or anthropological.<sup>33</sup>

Another instructive case is that of the responsible reclamation of social practices and histories for which there were limited vocabularies or recourses to preservation at their time, such as the highly particularized friendships between female English boarding-school students and their fellow students and instructors described by Vicinus in "Distance and Desire." These are friendships that we would recognize today -- and were understood at the time -- to be romantic. Similarly to Santos-Granero, Vicinus writes against the grain of a historical literature

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, anthropologists have found counter-evidence against, ex., "the particular model of friendship enshrined by nineteenth-century romantics" that we might find in Montaigne. "Relations of friendship can be found in almost all human societies [but] models of friendship" -- from Montaigne's, to Aristotle's, to the one Santos-Granero gives here -- "vary substantially." Santos-Granero, 8 - 11.

<sup>33</sup> Compare Cavell's treatment of genre in his reading of *King Lear* in "The Avoidance of Love," where the play's success as *just this* tragedy depends on the degree to which readers/spectators give themselves to it fully as a tragedy. It is the *genre*, and the ways the characters are qualified by genre, that is authoritative here. In a future project, I would like to try describing practice on the model of improvisation (as it's discussed in Nussbaum/Diamond) and genre (as it features in Cavell's "Avoidance of Love").

that is obsessed with understanding such romance in terms of “external [expert] labeling” -- ex., lesbian -- and the impact this had upon how the general public, and the women involved, conceived of their relationships.<sup>34</sup> Rather, she turns her attention to the rituals and testimonies surrounding “the adolescent crush during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” or raves, within the English same-sex boarding school, examining how they depended upon -- and broke with -- “general social attitudes towards women as public and private beings;”<sup>35</sup> this, to the aim of beginning to ascertain when, and how, the discourse of homosexual deviance gradually became applied to raves.<sup>36</sup>

Vicinus draws from her sources -- Victorian manners books; the (semi-fictionalized or novelized) autobiographies of former students and headmistresses; archives and anthologies of students’ letters, recollections, and personal diaries; and representations of these friendships in film -- a rich picture of the *liminal* quality of these raves: One where the Victorian ethos of self-control and spiritual purity combined to create “a paradox of self-fulfillment through unrequited love,”<sup>37</sup> such that the rave could be justified and subjected to institutional regulation and control on account of the role it played in a girl’s “moral development” at the same that it permitted the girl to indulge in her fantasies and desires via performing services for her beloved; narrativizing and dissecting the rave with her school friends; and lending what had become “virtually meaningless [gestures]” -- such as the good night kiss given by the head of the school to her students -- a subversively intimate, “private yet public” significance reconnected to its original meaning of one’s uniqueness and anticipation for “future happiness.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Martha Vicinus, “Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships” in *Signs* 9 (4; 1984) 600.

<sup>35</sup> Vicinus, 601, 604.

<sup>36</sup> Vicinus, 621.

<sup>37</sup> Vicinus, 602, 608.

<sup>38</sup> Vicinus, 617, 607, 609 - 610.

What is crucial in Vicinus' account of these friendships is that to some extent, all her sources -- inclusive of the literature to which her own is intended as an alternative -- frustrate the recognition of what these relationships really were, at the time (for their constituents and observers) and in hindsight (for those seeking to reclaim a history there was no public interest in preserving).<sup>39</sup> Doing justice to this relation means looking "at the specific preconditions [it required to] flourish" -- the social norms the English same-sex boarding school served and inculcated in its students; the *specific* means for self-articulation, in word and deed, that this environment provided; and the latitude for self-knowledge, -recognition, and -expression these means afforded women at the time.<sup>40</sup> As Vicinus is careful to illustrate, these women "[lacked] an appropriate language, or even an inappropriate one" to articulate the *homosexual* nature of their affections for their raves at the time.<sup>41</sup> But it was just *this* lack that made *these* articulations possible, and that discloses the tragic dimension of a former ravee's quote, with which Vicinus closes her paper -- "Is this real? Is this sincere?"<sup>42</sup>

I take cases like this one to show that one's capacity to struggle with and stylize oneself in light of the reality of one's life -- its sincerity -- is inseparable from its sociocultural scaffolding.

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Bearing these examples of the first way one might answer questions about self-articulation in mind -- that is, by the description of particulars -- I turn now to the second,

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<sup>39</sup> A favorite dismissal, from these women's contemporaries and current critics alike, is calling such romantic friendships preambles to heterosexual relationships. See Vicinus, 609, and her writing on the denials and distortions of female sexuality in general, 619 and 621.

<sup>40</sup> Vicinus, 602, 621.

<sup>41</sup> Vicinus, 621.

<sup>42</sup> Vicinus, 622.

more straightforwardly philosophical way, about the self and socioculture's co-constitution. For the discussion of a social practice like friendship to be complete, *both* ways are necessary. I have alluded to the interdependence of philosophy of mind and ethics at several points in this paper; and now, I want to cash out this interdependence in terms of the interconnectedness of the concepts of practice, criteria, and tradition in McDowell's picture of self-development and -recognition -- itself part of his account of rule-following.

Diamond anticipates his position in her contribution to *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, "Rules: Looking in the Right Place." Here, Diamond takes Wittgenstein to demonstrate that holding a term's conceptual or logical possibility apart from the life within which it features is to inaugurate a confusion about rules attributable to Saul Kripke and his sympathizers -- that, in our lives, rules are simply a function of their assertion-conditions. 'Simply,' because such a position divorces the very notion of agreement from that upon which we agree: Conceptual and logical possibility, on the one hand, and the agreement in our perceptions and judgments that scaffold these, on the other.<sup>43</sup> They cannot be taken separately or each (reductively) explained in terms of the other, on pain of regress or of trivializing the notion of convention. Rather, they are aspects of the same: To style it in terms of the common Wittgensteinian refrain, it's not so much that the meaning of a term is its use -- it's that a term's meaning and usage emerge together.<sup>44</sup>

The key notion in this development is that of *practice* as it is deployed in the body of commentary McDowell produced on the later Wittgenstein and rule-following from the early

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<sup>43</sup> Most succinctly: "The switch from 'imaginable' to 'logically possible' or 'conceptually possible' ... is almost a guarantee that we shall miss the point." Diamond, "Rules: Looking in the Right Place" in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars -- Essays in Honor of Rush Rhees*, eds. D.Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990) 21.

<sup>44</sup> I am grateful to supervisions with Kevin Cahill for the elaboration of this point.

'80s, up to and inclusive of the publication of *Mind and World* in the early '90s. Like Diamond, McDowell situates rules' normativity in our practices; but this is not to say -- with Kripke and philosophers similar to him<sup>45</sup> -- that whether one has followed or deviated from a rule is merely a matter of convention. Here, we should understand "convention" to refer to sociocultural customs,<sup>46</sup> statistics, societal majorities, and the like -- all that is available to us when we ask if one of our peers has succeeded or failed in following a rule. But there is no necessary relationship between convention, so understood, and our commonsense conception of objectivity as something that exists "outside" of us -- a conception that we (naively) take to justify an appeal to convention when we determine whether or not someone has (in)correctly followed a rule.

McDowell's rule-following papers endeavor to preserve this conception of objectivity against readings like Kripke's and Wright's. His task is to explain rules' normativity in terms of a (thoroughly Wittgensteinian) notion of practice without forsaking our commonsense conception of objectivity as unknowable, unintelligible, or intarticulable, or -- if it is knowable, intelligible, and articulable -- inviting accusations of a relativism that would undermine *any* notion of objectivity entirely.<sup>47</sup> It is a conception of objectivity that anticipates Nussbaum's, one she describes as "'internal' and human [in that its] raw material is the history of human social

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<sup>45</sup> I take Crispin Wright's "authoritarian" or decision-based reading of those sections to be one example. See McDowell's take-down of it in "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule" in *Synthese* 58 (1984) 325 - 363 and David H. Finkelstein's "Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism" in *The New Wittgenstein*, eds. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (Oxford: Routledge, 2000) 53 - 73.

<sup>46</sup> Inclusive of hierarchical relationships set up by our sociocultural institutions, such as the teacher-student relationship. See McDowell and Finkelstein's discussions of Wright for more.

<sup>47</sup> This summarizes his account of the unity of virtues, wherein the virtuous person is such because of the way in which she perceives what he calls situational "salience" -- i.e., what it is about any given circumstance that calls on her to act in the "right" way. If we want to understand her reasons for action, we must see as she does; her rationality is not discernible outside of the practice motivating it. See John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" in *The Monist* 62 (3; 1979) 331 - 350. I take it that the whole of his work is in the service of this picture of virtue.

experience[;] it does not even attempt to approach the world as it might be ‘in itself,’ uninterpreted, unhumanized” -- as if objectivity in *that* sense were possible.<sup>48</sup>

McDowell’s first shot at fulfilling this task comes in his paper on non-cognitivism, which pits the key point of his earlier essay “Virtue and Reason” against a conception of objectivity that he takes non-cognitivists and descriptivists to depend upon, i.e., one wherein we can conceive of the “genuine” features of a concrete/abstract object (like a rule or personal quality) independently of the value we give it in our practices.<sup>49</sup> If this picture of objectivity were granted, McDowell points out that it should be conceivable for someone to grasp the extension (I prefer to say application) of, for example, a moral virtue like courage, without having to enter into the evaluative outlook of the community within which it is taught and learned. But McDowell argues that this is unintelligible: A rule or virtue must be learned and experienced within the bounds of those practices where it factors as a value and where we are sensitive/sensitized to others’ reactions and expectations. This is not also to say that it is not possible to develop criteria for correctly following a rule. It’s just that this criteria is relative to the standards of rationality scaffolding the practice to which the rule belongs, and for criteria to be properly understood or applied, one must be minimally involved with the practice to which it corresponds.

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<sup>48</sup> Nussbaum, “Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination,” 164; my scarequotes. Compare Murdoch in “The Idea of Perfection:” “The idea of ‘objective reality’ ... undergoes important modifications when it is to be understood, not in relation to ‘the world described by science,’ but in relation to the progressing life of a person. The active ‘reassessing’ and ‘redefining’ which is a main characteristic of live personality often suggests and demands a checking procedure which is a function of an individual history. Repentance may mean something different to an individual at different times in his life, and what it fully means is a part of this life and cannot be understood except in context.” (25)

<sup>49</sup> John McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following” in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, eds. S. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich (Oxford: Routledge, 1981) 141 - 162.

So far, it's not obvious how McDowell's treatment of practice is substantially different from Kripke's notion of convention. One could simply say that McDowell describes a conception of relative objectivity to which at least some aspects of Kripke's reading could conform (for example, statistics, collected in accordance with our best social scientific practice, by which we have made successful predictions or constructed useful public policy; or institutions and cultural customs unique to our society and/or vital to its proper functioning, like standards for politeness). Sure, we may need to look at a rule or virtue from an evaluative outlook relative to our practices in order to grasp its objective content, as this content is bound by said practices; but this conception of objectivity is dead on arrival in the sense that it cannot admit of (or adjudicate) real disagreement -- i.e., disagreement between members of the same society with wildly different takes on a cultural value or norm, or members of different societies with incompatible cultural values and norms.

McDowell begins to address this in "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule."<sup>50</sup> There, he launches a parallel critique of Kripke and Wright's interpretations of the later Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks, arguing that they fail to appreciate Wittgenstein's primary target -- that is, an anti-realist picture of meaning that assimilates interpretation to understanding and that extends to (what is on that picture) our fundamental inability to have any knowledge (i.e., justified true beliefs) of others. McDowell claims that we must deny such an assimilation if we are to preserve a notion of mutual/intersubjective intelligibility and bounds this denial up with a research program that takes our practices as intelligibility's bedrock.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," *Synthese* 58 (1984) 325 - 363.

<sup>51</sup> See, in particular, McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," 342, where he refers to this as *Wittgenstein's* program. Interestingly, he abandons this interpretation in Footnote 8 of his "Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XVII (1992) 52, and later becomes hostile to the idea of "constructive philosophy" centered on our practices -- see especially

This is consistent with his approach in “Virtue and Reason” (and, at least superficially, with “Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following”), but it does not reach its full articulation until his final paper on the topic, “Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy.” Here, McDowell explicitly frames his approach by asking how it is a person would need to grasp the meaning of a rule in order for it to bear a normative relationship to her behavior. In it, he (once again) dismisses (a Kripkensteinian construction of Wittgenstein’s ‘master thesis’ on) interpretation as that by which the notion of “accord” gains its normative force, arguing instead that we should look to our practices of recognition and acceptance (as he has described these in his previous essays). But in order to preserve a realist conception of meaning on such a picture (i.e., one where its normativity is tied to the objective world -- a kind of ‘ratification-independence’ divorced from the threat of regress in any appeal to interpretation), he appeals to a conception of accord tied to our training within different (albeit interconnected) social practices scaffolded by the very concepts of meaning and understanding they also instantiate.

So, for McDowell, there appears to be a minimal/irreducible foundation for mutual intersubjectivity/intelligibility that bears a thoroughly objective relationship to the world without dependence on any strain of essentialism. This is easier to grasp if we conceive of it in terms of McDowell’s quietist (or non-metaphysical) realism: We simply cannot participate in practices, let alone (philosophically) reflect upon or discuss them, without presupposing the very concepts of meaning and understanding they require to get off the ground. They are not “grounded” in

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John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 95. Sabina Lovibond nonetheless finds encouragement for such a philosophy in McDowell’s work in her “Second Nature, *Habitus*, and the Ethical: Remarks on Wittgenstein and Bourdieu” in *Ethical Perspectives* 22 (1; 2015) 131 - 149.

meaning or understanding taken independently of the concept of practice, as we necessarily find them in any given practice -- where “grounding” would imply that “meaning” and “understanding” are independently knowable or conceptualizable outside of practice via reduction to, ex., sense-data or some scientific examination.

The clearest articulation of this point comes in “Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge.” Here, McDowell discusses a common misreading of “criterion” as it is found in Wittgenstein’s later work, where it is taken to denote defeasible<sup>52</sup> evidence for a claim according to “grammar” or “convention.”<sup>53</sup> McDowell objects to this as a faithful reading of Wittgenstein’s later work and a successful response to the problem of other minds -- but what matters most for our purposes is the defense he gives of a position he calls “M-realism” alongside these objections, “according to which, on a suitable occasion, the circumstance that someone else is in some ‘inner’ state can itself be an object of one’s experience,” and “not merely through behavioral proxies.” That is, “one can literally perceive, in another person’s facial expression or his behavior, that he is [for instance] in pain, and not just *infer* that he is in pain from what one perceives.”<sup>54</sup>

This is *not* equivalent to an argument that every time someone expresses pain, they *are* in pain. What McDowell tries to show is that, for the *appearance* of someone’s being in pain to obtain as much as for the *actual case* of someone’s being in pain to obtain, the same criteria must

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<sup>52</sup> Where this means that “a state of information in which one is in possession of a ‘criterial’ warrant for a claim can always be expanded into a state of information in which the claim would not be warranted at all.” John McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” *Epistemology: An Anthology, 2nd Edition*, eds. Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) 876 - 890.

<sup>53</sup> Here, these are roughly equivalent to “practice” as I’ve used them throughout this essay.

<sup>54</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 876. Emphasis mine.

be satisfied -- i.e., that of what constitutes an expression of pain.<sup>55</sup> Whether one is in a circumstance where they perceive someone's real pain (ex., as bystander to an accident) or are deceived about someone's pain (ex., as audience member at the theater) is immaterial to just this point about M-realism: That the satisfaction of any given criterion (for, ex., telling that someone is in pain) is not equivalent to whether or not a statement dependent upon that criterion is true (ex., 'he *is* in pain').

An exception to this disjunction is “[those] occasions which are ‘paradigmatically suitable’ for training in [a statement’s] assertoric use,” wherein the “satisfaction of criteria” must *also* involve “the realization of truth-conditions, properly so regarded.”<sup>56</sup> I take these occasions to be those that are our ‘first contacts’ with the sociocultural *stuff* of self-articulation -- that is, when we learn, *within and by virtue of* specific practices, what is meaningful -- as an expression of, ex., pain, respect, love, etc. -- and in so doing learn *what* they are and *of* their value.<sup>57</sup> It is an idea we find in Nussbaum’s own conception of objectivity<sup>58</sup> as much as in McDowell’s neo-Aristotelian conception of “second nature” in *Mind and World*, by which our rationality is both “integrally part of [our] animal nature” and constituted by sociocultural practices unisolable from how we understand what it means to be a human being and how we discourse with our fellow persons.<sup>59</sup> There, he stresses that it is not something we are born with -- rather, we have it

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<sup>55</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 881.

<sup>56</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 876 - 877.

<sup>57</sup> Compare McDowell’s treatment of “initiation” into a tradition in *Mind and World*. Note that this is not equivalent to one’s babyhood. While the learning curve is steeper when we are younger, learning is not something we stop doing -- consider, ex., moving to another country and familiarizing yourself with your new home’s language and customs.

<sup>58</sup> “Value is anthropocentric, not fixed altogether independently of desires and needs of human beings.” Nussbaum, “The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality,” 62.

<sup>59</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 78.

in virtue of the “tradition” within which we are raised, for which the language we learn is its “repository.”<sup>60</sup>

I believe one of the best illustrations of this integrated conception of criteria, socioculture, and selfhood is Stanley Cavell’s work. Building up to the injunction that skepticism of other minds is the tragic denial of another’s personhood in *Claim of Reason*,<sup>61</sup> he writes that “criteria are the terms in which I relate what’s happening, make sense of it by giving its history, say what ‘goes before and after.’ ... This explicitly makes our agreement in judgment, our attunement expressed through criteria, agreement in valuing.”<sup>62</sup> He is adamant that it is not up to *us* -- as beings somehow divorceable from the structures by which we’ve learned what it is to be ourselves, *human* -- what the landscape of normativity looks like, in that “you may of course decide to make a moral issue out of a conflict[;] but you cannot decide what will be making it a moral issue, what kinds of reasons, entered in what way, to what effect, will be moral reasons.”<sup>63</sup> As I’ve written in a previous piece,<sup>64</sup> we cannot default on the sociocultural structure within which we have been raised because it constitutes our humanity in virtue of our training and upbringing<sup>65</sup> -- it marks the limits and latitude of one’s style of thought, as Diamond might say.<sup>66</sup>

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I mentioned I would conclude by defending this position’s prescriptive superiority -- a position that extracts value from practice, rather than measures practice against value. In what’s

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<sup>60</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 126; 184.

<sup>61</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 493.

<sup>62</sup> Cavell, 93 - 94.

<sup>63</sup> Cavell, 289.

<sup>64</sup> “The Human Good of Articulateness.”

<sup>65</sup> McDowell, “Criteria, Defeasibility, Knowledge,” 126.

<sup>66</sup> In particular, she implies that we should think of our “style of thought” as bearing on our “capacities as [moral agents]:” Diamond, “Losing Your Concepts,” 271.

come before, I've shown the inextricability of practice from value; fleshed this point out at the level of the particular, with anthropological-historical studies, and at the level of the general, by delineating the co-dependence of philosophy of mind and ethics; and shown how self-articulability -- what it is to be a self, to take someone else as other -- is inseparable from sociocultural structure. Now, I want to tie this back to my criticism of philosophers of friendship who take themselves to work in the Aristotelian tradition.

If one approaches a social practice like friendship in their style -- extracting from Aristotle's discussion an *ur*-value like individual flourishing, to which the value of friendship is measured and ultimately subordinated -- one will not produce a description of friendship that reflects its normativity in practice. This is how one generates purely 'philosophical' paradoxes, like the ones that frame popular discussions of the justifications of *particular* friendships: If a person attempts to justify her friendship with another in terms of the friend's properties, she will meet with the problem of fungibility, wherein the friend -- an irreplaceable, special person in her life -- *should* be traded for another, less problematic person with the same qualities, should she happen to meet them. And if she attempts to justify her continued loyalty to her friend in terms of their shared history, in spite of the existence of a 'more perfect' version of her friend or the friend's loss of the properties she once admired, this is dismissed as a mere *explanation* for the relation's endurance; it is -- on the notion of justification attendant on philosophies of friendship that subject friendship's value to some higher *ur*-value -- arbitrary, illegitimate reasoning.<sup>67</sup>

But it is just *this* style of philosophizing that fails to do justice to the way justification actually works in our friendships -- to the reasons we would accept for a friendship's

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<sup>67</sup> In particular, refer to section 2 ("Value and Justification of Friendship") in Helm's "Friendship" article, cited in Footnote 1.

termination, continuation, and reconciliation alike, as ones that come from *a friend, this friend* (or someone we thought was a friend, a former friend, a potential new friend, etc.).<sup>68</sup> The fundamental pieces -- one's properties; shared history -- are still present in these paradoxes, but they are not given their due in light of, ex., how (what are taken to be) one's personal properties emerge and are qualified in the course of a friendship,<sup>69</sup> or how the course of that friendship depends upon socioculturally delimited exigencies (to respect another commitment, say), personal desires (to not respect that commitment), and norms (to conceive of our commitments as uniquely valuable, in kind as much as in their particular manifestations).

In the context of a social practice, justification for one's statements and behaviors is a skill one can become more or less competent at, depending on the resources available to her for making sense of her situation and articulating her perceptions; and, in being a skill, it is something for which one can develop a style, particular to herself and to her relations. If one wants to do well by herself and her loved ones -- and better by the sociocultural resources that bound her approaches and alienations -- she must start with the best description she can give, the most sincere reflection she can manage, and be *responsible* in the fullest sense of the word -- "to the history of the commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are forged freshly on each occasion, in an active and intelligent confrontation between her own history and the requirements of the

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<sup>68</sup> The most incisive example of this is Nussbaum's "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination." Consider this quote: "For it to become a solution it has to be offered in the right way at the right time in the right tone, in such a way that she can take it; offered without pressing any of the hidden springs of guilt and loyalty in her that he knows so clearly how to press; offered so that he gives her up with greatness, with beauty, in a way that she can love and find wonderful." (150)

<sup>69</sup> See my previous paper, "Being Oneself: Reconceptualizing Sincerity and Alienation in the Existentialist Tradition" in *Replikk* 45 (2018): 39 - 48.

occasion.”<sup>70</sup> Contexts have their limitations as much as selves do; it is only by the stubborn attempt to honor both that they break and grow.

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<sup>70</sup> Nussbaum, “The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Public and Private Rationality,” 94.

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