

Interpersonal Invisibility and the Recognition of Other Persons

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To recognize another as a person one must respond to him and act towards him in certain ways; and these ways are intimately connected with the various prima facie duties. Acknowledging these duties in *some* degree, and so having the elements of morality, is not a matter of choice, or of intuiting moral qualities, or a matter of the expression of feelings or attitudes...; it is simply the possession of one of the forms of conduct in which the recognition of others as persons is manifested. (Rawls 1958, 183)

1. Malcolm X's Complaint

If we take certain common forms of moral complaint and social critique at face value, there would appear to be a morally important sense in which people can be visible or invisible to one another.

Consider a striking anecdote shared by Malcolm X about his time in a detention home. While the managers of the home—the Swerlins—treated the young Malcolm X with kindness and affection, their way of relating to him had a dimension of significance that he only dimly grasped at the time. The Swerlins, he tells us, ‘would talk about anything and everything with me standing right there hearing them, the same way people would talk freely in front of a pet canary. They would even talk about me, or about “n——s”, as though I wasn’t there, as if I wouldn’t understand what the word meant’ (X and Haley 1965, 26–7). Malcolm X draws a critical lesson from this and similar incidents:

[I]t just never dawned upon them that I could understand, that I wasn’t a pet, but a human being. ...But it has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren’t considered *of* them. Even

though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me*.¹ (X and Haley 1965, 27—emphasis in the original)

Of course, talk of the Swerlins failing to see Malcolm X is a metaphor, to some extent. He does not literally accuse them, or white Americans generally, of bad eyesight. Still, the language of vision seems integral to his complaint. He does not primarily fault them for *treating* him badly. As he presents it, the problem is with the view they have of him: the way that they *regard* him is bad—deficient, distorted. The Swerlins, he claims, do not recognize him as a ‘human being’, as a person.² According to Malcolm X, what is invisible to them—to most white Americans—is his humanity. And it is this blind spot that leads them to treat him with a lack of moral consideration.

I will call this phenomenon *interpersonal invisibility*: treating others in a way that evinces a failure to recognize their humanity or personhood. Now it may turn out that the language of vision is *merely* metaphorical in such contexts, in which case there is no phenomenon to speak of. But I want to take seriously the idea that Malcolm X’s complaint—indeed, this whole genre of complaint—is non-metaphorically true, that there *is* a morally significant phenomenon here. So much is suggested by the fact that interpersonal invisibility is a perennial theme of (especially modern) moral complaint and social critique. At any rate, such complaints naturally raise the question of what it would be, exactly, for the humanity of others to be visible to us, in the relevant sense. What would it be to recognize, say, Malcolm X as a person, in a way that might then lead us to show him the requisite consideration? And what exactly has gone wrong with people who, like the Swerlins, fail to see him as a human being and so fail to treat him in morally decent ways? In short, what is it to recognize (or fail to recognize) another person *as a person*?

¹ For a compelling fictional exploration of interpersonal invisibility, see Ellison 1995, viz. 3–14. See Fanon 2008, ch. 5, for an excellent phenomenological account of a similar phenomenon.

² For the most part, I will treat ‘human being’ not as designating a biological species but as synonymous with ‘person’ in the non-technical sense of the term. For the sake of clarity, I will mostly use ‘person’ in what follows.

My primary aim in this essay is to suggest a framework for addressing these large, seemingly intractable questions, one that is rooted in contemporary analytic moral psychology. But I would also like to build a preliminary case for an unorthodox account of interpersonal invisibility and a corresponding view of what it is to recognize someone as a person. For Malcolm X's use of the language of vision suggests the intriguing possibility that recognition goes hand in hand with modes of person-specific concern, so that recognizing someone as a person is intimately connected with motives for treating her with basic consideration. After all, his complaint is that the Swerlins failed to see him as a human being, *not* that they failed to see him as a human being and *also* did not care about him enough to show him consideration—as if they could fully appreciate his humanity while caring about him only as we would care about things. I want to explore the prospect that it is a condition of enjoying an unblemished awareness of a person's subjectivity that we have some disposition to exhibit modes of concern for her that differ, in kind, from the ways that we care about nonpersons. This view of recognition—the engagement model—deserves its day in court. I argue that my account yields the basis for a plausible account of interpersonal invisibility and that it is attractive on independent grounds.

My project is motivated by the sense that it would be desirable to know whether the notion of interpersonal recognition is suited to play a substantial role in moral complaint and social critique. Is Malcolm X's complaint, or any similar one, literally true? If so, what makes it true? Is it fruitful to think of interpersonal invisibility as a failure to see someone as a person? My ultimate hope is that addressing such questions will yield a verdict on a familiar, homespun humanism that is arguably at the heart of a liberal-democratic ethic: roughly, the idea that relating to other people in morally and politically acceptable ways involves fully seeing their humanity, and thereby coming to acknowledge a shared humanity. Plausibly, some such idea

underlies the conviction that one important goal of moral education and politics is to facilitate widespread mutual recognition. While this form of humanism may be thought to provide us with an appealing way of conceptualizing a central task of our ethical and political lives, it is also widely challenged, indeed frequently derided as a consoling fantasy.³ To adjudicate this dispute, we need a moral psychology of interpersonal recognition: we must know what it is to see someone as a person—the nature of this state of mind and its connection to human action.

2. Two Conceptions of Interpersonal Recognition

I would like to consider the suggestion that a certain practically and affectively engaged orientation toward others is a necessary condition for recognizing or seeing them as persons. Going forward, I will use the term ‘recognizing another person as a person’ to refer to the state of *seeing* or *regarding* someone else *as* a human being or person—a state that, when all goes well, constitutes direct awareness of some individual as minded in the same way that we are. I will call this state of mind *interpersonal recognition*, or simply ‘recognition’ for short; it is also (roughly) equivalent to what philosophers and psychologists call ‘person-perception’.

As a first step in our search for an alternative conception of interpersonal recognition, I propose that we look to a venerable tradition in ethics which holds that moral judgment is tied to moral motivation in such a way that we do not count as making that sort of judgment if we lack the corresponding motives altogether.⁴ Standardly, this idea has been expressed through the thesis of *motivational judgment-internalism*. There are several extant formulations of this thesis, but here is one that appears particularly plausible: necessarily, (1) a person judges that ϕ -ing is

³ See Manne 2016, 2018, and the commentators in Honneth 2012.

⁴ Or, more accurately, two distinct traditions in modern moral philosophy: the sentimentalist tradition exemplified, most notably, by David Hume and Adam Smith, and the strand of the rationalist tradition epitomized by Immanuel Kant.

morally wrong only if she possesses a motive for not ϕ -ing, and (2) a person judges that ϕ -ing is morally required only if she possesses a motive for ϕ -ing.⁵ Note that this formulation does not assert that we will infallibly be moved to act in accordance with our moral judgments but only that in making these judgments we will always have *some* motive for complying with them. Motivational judgment-internalism is therefore compatible with the possibility of our failing to act on our moral judgments, either because the relevant moral motive is defeated by some countervailing nonmoral motive or because we are under the influence of a form of practical irrationality or general motivational disorder, such as weakness of will, depression, and the like. The denial of this thesis is *motivational judgment-externalism*: the view that we count as making a moral judgment even if we lack *any* motive whatsoever for conforming to it. Thus, for this sort of externalist, any link between moral judgment and moral motivation is only a contingent one.⁶

The upshot of the internalist thesis is that a person cannot count as fully appreciating the normative force of a moral requirement if she has no motive for following it—if she is deeply indifferent or hostile to the prospect of ever acting on it. My proposal is that we explore the possibility that recognizing others as persons is like moral judgment in this respect, then. What we need, analogously, is an ‘internalist’ conception of recognition—a view on which recognizing someone as a person is tied to some class of motives in such a way that we cannot count as enjoying that form of awareness if we totally lack the motives in question. But which motives?

One idea is that we count as recognizing another person as a person only if we have *moral* motives: motives for treating her (and others) in accordance with the requirements of morality. Maybe the thesis is true. But it is *incredibly* strong, setting a very high bar for seeing a

⁵ Prominent statements of (some version of) motivational judgment-internalism include McNaughton 1988, ch. 7; Smith 1994, ch. 3; McDowell 1998a and 1998b; and Blackburn 1998, ch. 3. Wallace 2006 is also helpful.

⁶ Canonical defenses of motivational judgment-externalism include Brink 1984, 1989, ch. 1, and 1997; Shafer-Landau 2003, part 3; and Svavarsdóttir 1999, 2006.

person as a person. For the implication seems to be that we cannot be credited with recognizing someone's humanity unless we are disposed to treat her morally. Of course, we could make the thesis more palatable by amending it so that it reads: we count as *fully* seeing a person as a person only if we have motives for treating her morally. But then we run the risk of reducing complaints about interpersonal invisibility to triviality. If all that Malcolm X means when he claims that the Swerlins didn't see him as human is that they were not disposed to treat him well, that is evocative but misleading rhetoric. To be theoretically interesting, his complaint must charge the Swerlins with having not just bad motives but also a deficient awareness of his subjectivity. Absent a persuasive story about why moral motives are necessary for fully seeing others as persons, we would do better to start with a formulation with higher initial credibility.

Here's another idea: perhaps it is a necessary condition for recognizing someone as a person that we possess motives not specifically for treating him morally but for *treating him as a person*. Although the phrase 'treating someone as a person' has a moralized ring to it, I will take it to designate a category of action that's far broader than the category of treating others morally. I will say that we treat someone as a person, in this sense, when—or insofar as—we treat him in ways that evince, or express, a non-instrumental concern for his perspective: his experiences, thoughts, emotions, and aims. A surprisingly wide range of acts fit this description, from the deliberate to the unreflective, the humane to the inhumane, the significant to the trivial.

One salient ('positive') form of treatment is benevolent in its orientation—returning the keys that someone has dropped, say.⁷ But that does not seem to be the only form. Acting from certain distinctively interpersonal sorts of hostility—for instance, racial/ethnic hatred or a sense of vengeance—also involves caring about another person's perspective for its own sake rather

⁷ The link between sympathy and the recognition of other persons is a familiar theme of Wittgenstein's later work. See Wittgenstein 1953, 97–103 (§§281–310), and Winch 1980–81.

than merely instrumentally.⁸ Thus, there are also ‘negative’ ways of treating someone as a person. The category of treating someone as a person, in my sense, is not exactly a moralized one, then, since acts of this kind may be morally required, morally wrong, or merely permissible. It is nevertheless a morally significant one, both because *not* treating someone as a person is at least *prima facie* morally objectionable and because non-instrumental concern for another perspective arguably constitutes a proto-ethical orientation toward the object of that concern.

We are now in a position to formulate a more modest version of the ‘internalist’ conception of recognition suggested above. According to *motivational recognition-internalism*, we count as seeing someone as a person only if we possess some motive for treating her as a person, in the sense specified. Hence, on this position, grasping the reality of another individual is inseparable from possessing motives for treating her in a way that evinces, or expresses, non-instrumental concern for her perspective, just as for the motivational judgment-internalist, grasping the reality of a moral requirement is inseparable from possessing motives for following it.⁹ And as before, this thesis is consistent with the possibility of seeing someone as a person yet failing to treat her accordingly due to the standard forms of motivational interference and disorder. Similarly, *motivational recognition-externalism* is the rejection of its internalist counterpart; it is the view that we count as seeing another person as a person even if we happen to lack any motive for treating her as a person, as when we are totally indifferent to her.

To affirm either of these views is not yet to articulate a definite conception of recognition. It is just to point to the general region of logical space where we might hope to find

⁸ Compare Stanley Cavell’s notion of acknowledgment. See Cavell 2001, in particular.

⁹ Technically, this view should be called ‘moderate motivational recognition-internalism’, to contrast it with the strong motivational recognition-internalism advanced in the preceding paragraphs. But this label is terribly unwieldy, and since strong motivational recognition-internalism appears quite unpromising, I’ll use ‘motivational recognition-internalism’ to refer to my view.

one. Here again, though, we can take our cue from the dispute between the more familiar internalism and externalism. For what seems to be at issue between them is, roughly, whether making a moral judgment is a purely intellectual act of mind or an essentially action-guiding one. I suggest an analogous pair of conceptions of what it is to recognize another person as a person.

The first is what I will call the *classification model*: the view that interpersonal recognition is the mental act of categorizing a certain entity—a person—as such, so as to enable its behavior to be explained and predicted. Specifically, on this view, recognizing someone as a person consists in, or depends on, the formation of the purely intellectual belief that she is a person, and forming such a belief is itself the dispassionate act of sorting her into a folk-metaphysical category in our empirical conception of the world. Recognition is therefore a motivationally inert state of mind: it cannot by itself move its subject to act and plays a role in motivation only when combined with some independent motive. *A fortiori*, then, our seeing someone as a person does not imply that we have motives for treating her as a person; the classification model entails motivational recognition-externalism, in other words. To recognize another person as a person, we need not have any particular motives with respect to her, just as to recognize something as a stone, we need not have any particular motives with respect to it.

According to the *engagement model*, on the other hand, interpersonal recognition consists not in a kind of disengaged metaphysical classification but, rather, in a whole network of characteristically interpersonal forms of emotional involvement and practical engagement. This view holds that recognizing someone as a person consists in, or depends on, a kind of direct experience of that person's perspective—one that is conditioned by the recognizer's own affective responsiveness and distinctively interpersonal concern for the one so recognized.¹⁰

¹⁰ Work by advocates of the engagement model includes Wittgenstein 1953, viz. 178; Sartre 1956, part 3; Rawls 1958; Murdoch 1959, 2001; Hamlyn 1974; Diamond 1978; Cavell 1979, part 4, and 2001; Winch 1980–81; Weil

Now, clearly, on such a view, to count as seeing others as persons, we must be disposed to a range of affective, action-guiding attitudes to her in light of her mental states. Hence, the engagement model seems to be compatible with, and even friendly to, motivational recognition-internalism, although whether it also entails this view rests, ultimately, on what the relevant attitudes are taken to be. I propose that the class of attitudes in question includes sympathy and what P.F. Strawson calls the ‘reactive attitudes’—paradigmatically, resentment, indignation, pride, esteem, shame, and (certain kinds of) love, among others (Strawson 2008, 10). Crucially, these attitudes *do* constitute motives for treating others as persons, in the above sense, since they consist in or involve modes of non-instrumental concern for another person’s perspective.

So construed, the engagement model holds that recognizing someone as a person is a state of mind that is intrinsically linked to the possession of motives for broadly proto-ethical behavior. It follows that without a motivational profile of a certain broad shape, we would not be able to recognize others as persons; we would be capable of seeing them only as particularly sophisticated objects, instruments or obstacles relative to our ends. Caring about others’ perspectives non-instrumentally is necessary for recognizing them as persons, on this view.¹¹

Although there are other possible positions that also merit consideration (such as a hybrid view), I am going to focus on the choice between the classification model and the engagement model, and, in particular, on the accounts of interpersonal invisibility that are available to each position. Let’s start with the classification model, which notably drives a wedge between seeing someone as a person and those modes of concern for her that are appropriate to our dealings with

1965, 2003; Honneth 1992, 1996, and 2012, among other works; Honneth and Margalit 2001, 111–29; and Gaita 2002, chs. 4 and 13, and 2004, chs. 3 and 10.

¹¹ Metaphysical classification and interpersonal engagement do not appear to be mutually exclusive activities, of course, so there is yet another alternative—a kind of hybrid model. Although a hybrid model of recognition has its attractions, I will set it aside in this essay.

persons. What is it, on this model, for Malcolm X's humanity to be invisible to the Swerlins? In other words, what is it for them to fail to see him as a person, in the morally relevant sense?

According to the classification model, failing to see someone as a person consists crucially in ignorance of, or inattention to, some empirical fact about him, typically under the influence of a feeling or desire. The most radical variety is sheer metaphysical miscategorization of the person: failing to classify him as a person in our empirical conception of the world. On this account, however, failing to see someone as a person more commonly consists in holding false empirical beliefs about that person's capacities and/or false normative beliefs about her normative status. What the Swerlins lack, plausibly, is the purely intellectual belief that Malcolm X is sensitive, intelligent, and insightful, most likely because their prejudices toward African-Americans directed their attention away from expressions of these powers in Malcolm X.

This account of interpersonal invisibility appears to capture a familiar variety of the phenomenon. It is well known that prejudices or other bad attitudes can lead us to form false or unwarranted empirical beliefs about what others are like—to fail to see their humanity, in one perfectly natural sense. Yet we might wonder whether the phenomenon is broader still. For one interesting consequence of conceiving of the Swerlins's failure as ignorance of empirical fact is that it implies that Malcolm X would be committed to rescinding his complaint about them—that they did not see him as a person—if they ascribed the relevant capacities to him but nevertheless continued to talk about him as if he could not understand them, out of indifference to his thoughts and feelings rather than intellectual error. And in such a case, the classification model would be committed to the verdict that the Swerlins's view of Malcolm X was not deficient at all. The Swerlins simply had bad motives, and probably also bad normative beliefs about African-Americans to the effect that it is permissible to treat them in that way. Thus, the

Swerlins would not be guilty of having a blind spot in their view of Malcolm X as a person, on this account; rather, they would count as fully crediting him with sensitivity or understanding even though they were not disposed to exhibit *any* non-instrumental concern for his perspective. The classification model holds, then, that these are not cases of interpersonal invisibility at all.

It still seems to me, however, that complaints of interpersonal invisibility would also be in order in such cases. Ordinarily, people subject to this sort of mistreatment would, I think, tend to see the complaint as justified even if their victimizers showed themselves to be quite capable of sorting the persons from the non-persons and had no false beliefs about their capacities or normative status. The Swerlins's problem need not be with their beliefs about Malcolm X but with their *perception* of him. The engagement model reckons these cases as instances of recognition-failure, too, inasmuch as it holds that a certain affectively and practically engaged orientation toward another person is a necessary condition for—even constitutive of—seeing her as such. Thus, in showing unconcern for Malcolm X's perspective by speaking disparagingly of African-Americans in his presence, they displayed a failure to see him as a person. The engagement model gives us a picture of recognition that fits with this sort of moral complaint.¹²

If the engagement model is correct, we have the resources for saying that there *is* a defect in the Swerlins's view of Malcolm X but that it is not ignorance of empirical fact. We therefore have the basis of a compelling account of what it is for one person to be invisible to another. In remaining unmoved to treat Malcolm X as they would a white person in such contexts, in failing

¹² Perhaps recognizing someone as a person doesn't just entail caring about her perspective, however. Recognition of a person as such might also involve registering, to some degree, the force of her claim on us (or others) that we (or they) treat her and react to her as a person. That means that it entails seeing her as calling on us (or others) to treat her and react to her in a way that acknowledges the nonstrategic significance of her attitudes and aims.

This picture of interpersonal recognition therefore entails not only motivational recognition-internalism but also what we might call *normative recognition-internalism*: the view that we recognize another as a person only if we are prepared to acknowledge that she has the power to give us (and others) reasons through her attitudes and aims—reasons for treating her as a person and for reacting to her as to a person.

to appreciate the claims that he makes on them in light of his sensitivity and understanding, the Swerlins showed that they had an incomplete, indeed deficient view of his subjectivity—again, even if they happened to hold the purely intellectual belief that he is, in fact, a person. With the moral-psychological scaffolding provided by the engagement model, this kind of complaint wouldn't just express empty, if moving, metaphor. The language of invisibility would refer to a distinctive moral phenomenon, that of misrecognizing someone's humanity—a lack of awareness of her subjectivity that is also a failure to care about her in person-specific ways.

Of course, the mere fact that the engagement model arguably yields an attractive picture of interpersonal invisibility does not, by itself, give us sufficient reason to accept it. So, in the next two sections, I present two independent considerations in support of the engagement model, briefly arguing that it is more phenomenologically accurate and epistemically parsimonious than the alternatives.

3. Phenomenological Accuracy of the Engagement Model

One piece of evidence in favor of the engagement model is the fact that our awareness of other persons as persons appears, from the inside, to be significantly unlike our awareness of such entities as amoebae, aardvarks, galaxies, and elms. There seems to be a deeper difference between our awareness of persons and our awareness of things (and other animals), one that is evident in light of the phenomenological differences between these two forms of awareness.

To see how these states of mind differ, let's turn to Simone Weil, who observes that

[the] human beings around us exert just by their presence a power which belongs uniquely to themselves to stop, to diminish, or modify, each movement which our bodies design. A person who crosses our path does not turn aside our steps in the same manner as a street sign, no one stands up, or moves about, or sits down again in quite the same

fashion when he is alone in a room as when he has a visitor. (Winch 1980–81, 8; cf. Weil 1965, 167)

Our experience of others is organized by an immediate awareness of a kind of power that they have over us, which they exert on us seemingly just through the disclosure of their perspectives. To what power is Weil referring in this passage? I suggest that it is, most generally, the power of others *to influence our attitudes and will* through the disclosure of their own attitudes and will. And our awareness of this power in others is affectively laden and action-guiding. So, as I read Weil, we do not stand up, or move about, or sit down again in quite the same way when we are alone as when we are in someone else's presence because, in the latter case, we exhibit a felt sensitivity to what he thinks of us, how he feels about us, and which designs he has on us.

By way of illustration, recall what it is like to be looked at by another human being—surely one of the most direct and vivid experiences of a perspective that is not one's own. Imagine that I am sitting in a crowded train car. Lost in a book, I begin to hum or bite my fingernails absentmindedly. Suddenly, I sense that someone across the aisle is looking at me. As I look up, I meet the person's gaze directly. This is, to put it mildly, a fraught, indeed intense, experience—so much so that most of us cannot hold another person's gaze for very long. The normal experience of being looked at by others in this way is so fraught, I suggest, because built into that experience is a felt vulnerability to another person's attitudes and aims, particularly her evaluative attitudes toward us or those attitudes that bear on our evaluation of ourselves.

For suppose that the stranger in the train car looks to be disgusted or annoyed by my behavior. My seeing this other person's expression or hearing the tone of her voice is a direct experience of her subjectivity, an immediate presentation of a perspective that is different from my own. Now, in this situation, I may feel ashamed of myself, like the jealous man in Jean-Paul

Sartre's example who, peeping through a keyhole, finds himself stricken with shame when he hears footsteps (Sartre 1956, 342–54). Alternatively, I may feel a hint of defiance or hostility. Importantly, however, no matter exactly what I feel in light of the stranger's gaze, if anything, her attitudes—especially her attitudes toward me—do nevertheless strike me as having a direct, presumptive bearing or influence on my own attitudes and motivations. From the inside, in other words, it just does not appear as if this experience comprises two fully separable elements: on the one hand, the affectively and motivationally neutral recognition of the stranger's mental condition, and on the other hand, my feeling the relevant emotion(s) in light of her mental condition. Rather, the normal experience of the stranger's gaze presents the recognition of her mentality and this affectively/practically engaged orientation toward her as a seamless whole. My awareness of the stranger's perspective is permeated with non-instrumental concern for it.

To see this, consider how persons characteristically influence our attitudes and will, and how this differs from the ways that objects influence our attitudes and will. It is true that a boulder can turn aside our steps just as well as a person can, often much better, not to mention that it can provoke us to feel certain emotions—fear, say, when it is rolling toward us. Yet our experience of other persons is distinctive in that through their attitudes they have not just the power to move us to think, feel, and act—objects can do that, too, in some sense—but, more precisely, the power to move us by *presenting* us to ourselves in a certain evaluative light. For, crucially, we also tend to take up the perspectives of others and to regard ourselves as they regard us, which may lead us to feel (or think) about ourselves what they feel (or think) about us. That is not to claim that we always take up the perspectives of others or that we are always moved to adopt attitudes in response to others' attitudes, but that it is our default stance to see

others' attitudes as immediately relevant to the question of what we are to think, feel, and do.¹³

To see others' attitudes under this aspect is to feel our affective and motivational capacities engaged, even if we feel no emotion and experience no desire. This, I believe, is why being looked at—or, certainly, being spoken to—by another person is such a fraught experience.

I hope that it is obvious that no mere object can exert the same kind of influence on our attitudes and will, that only persons (and animals) can present us to ourselves in an evaluative light that purports to be immediately relevant to the appropriateness of our attitudes and aims. Even if I had a magic talisman that changed color whenever I behaved in some unbecoming manner, my experience of that object would still differ from my experience of the stranger's disgusted look, just as the shame that I feel at his gaze would differ from whatever shame I might feel in light of the talisman's 'verdict'—if I could even be said to feel shame in this situation at all. For, importantly, the talisman would generate no evaluative presentation. It would simply record certain evaluative facts about me which might then lead me to believe that I had behaved with impropriety. An object like the talisman could indicate facts about me which make shame on my part appropriate, certainly, but only a person can *shame* me, properly speaking, because only a person has a perspective capable of yielding evaluative presentations of the right sort.¹⁴

Of course, we can be aware of another person as a person without, however, feeling moved by that person's attitudes and aims, without being moved to take up her perspective. Does that spell trouble for the engagement model? No, because support for a version of the view also

¹³ In our earlier example, the stranger's disgust or annoyance, as conveyed by his gaze, will normally strike me as having a direct bearing on how I am to feel and think about myself, and also on the question of *what I, in fact, am*—whether I am disgusting, annoying, or loathsome. Sartre 1956, 347–52. I am indebted to Sarah Buss's excellent presentation of Sartre's view of shame and associated reflections on the moral significance of shame. See Buss 1999, 526–38.

¹⁴ But can't persons also move us in ways that non-rational animals cannot? Yes, but I have less to say about the exact differences here. Weil's case is obviously overstated: no one stands up, or moves about, or sits down again in quite the same fashion in the presence of a dog or cat as when he is alone, and that is because animals—or, anyway, quite a few animals—do have some power to influence our attitudes and will through evaluative presentations of us.

comes from attention to the phenomenology of being ignored by others—the experience of others ‘looking through’ us—and of being regarded, in some elusive sense, as an object.¹⁵

Returning once more to the train car, let us now suppose that the stranger is standing on my foot instead. I ask her to move, but she simply stares at me, vacantly, and does not budge. Perhaps she eyes me with that variety of curiosity that we normally reserve for insects, or brushes against me as against a wall. Why is this experience so unnerving? The stranger’s ‘looking through’ me in this way is unnerving, I believe, because my perspective has lost its power to influence her attitudes and will, and from the inside it appears that there is a conspicuous gap in the stranger’s view of my subjectivity, even if she knows that I am minded. It appears to me as if my mind is only partly present to her—as if my mind is ground rather than figure, in her view. That is why it is so common for people who are ignored in such a way to claim that their humanity was invisible—that they have not been seen—or, when they have been systematically ignored by others, to claim that they no longer seem human to themselves.

Thus, the phenomenology both of encountering and ignoring persons constitutes evidence that interpersonal recognition is deeply entangled with motives for interpersonal engagement.

4. Epistemic Parsimony of the Engagement Model

Another virtue of the engagement model is that it is equipped to provide us with a simpler, more natural account of how we come to know that other human beings are persons. At first glance, this may seem incredible. How could interpersonal recognition be an affectively laden, action-guiding state of mind toward someone yet not be based on a prior, purely intellectual belief that she is a person? Don’t we first have to *identify* others *as* persons before we can *identify with* them?

¹⁵ More on regarding someone as an object in §5, below.

Here I can only offer the merest sketch of an epistemology of other persons. This picture begins by reversing the order of dependence assumed by the questions of the last paragraph. We come to identify others as persons *by* identifying with them as fellow persons, where this posture of mind neither consists in, nor always depends on, a purely intellectual belief. And as a matter of fact, the experience of others' power to directly move our attitudes and will through their own can itself constitute the basis for the purely intellectual belief that they are persons, just as perceptual experience constitutes the basis for beliefs about the rest of the empirical world.

To see what I have in mind, consider an apparently similar phenomenon: recognizing someone as a same-speaker, a fellow speaker of our language. For simplicity's sake, let's stipulate that we are both native speakers of the same language. How, then, do I know that you speak the same language that I do? Well, here's one possible account: I arrive at a purely intellectual belief about the language that you speak in relation to the language that I speak, on the basis of taking the utterances that I hear from you as evidence that you are using the same string of sounds to mean what I mean when I myself utter similar-sounding sentences.¹⁶

Yet there is another, more elegant account of how I know that we share a language: in light of the resemblance between the sound of your words and the sound of mine, I just *hear* your words *as* the words of my language. No purely intellectual belief is required to pull this off. To recognize you as my same-speaker, I need not even form a prior classificatory belief concerning the resemblance between the sound of your words and the sound of mine. I can just hear the likeness. And in hearing it, I simply find myself understanding the thoughts expressed

¹⁶ Not that, on this account, I always go through this chain of reasoning explicitly: 'Her words sound like the ones I use to refer to such and such; if so, she must mean such and such by them; so, we speak the same language.' But according to this story, there is a rational or justificatory structure underpinning my recognition of you as my same-speaker and that structure is articulated by the above formulation, although I may never entertain it occurrently.

by your utterances. I therefore come to recognize you as my same-speaker. Appeal to a prior, purely intellectual belief is otiose in this context, as it is plainly in conflict with Occam's Razor.

Now, analogously, we can ask: how do I know that you have the same kind of mind that I have, that you are a fellow person? For simplicity's sake, let's stipulate that we are human beings and that we are in perceptual contact with one another: we are meeting face to face. Well, according to the classification model, to count as recognizing you as a person, I must first form the purely intellectual belief that you are a person, either via some sort of analogical inference—that is, by taking your behavior as evidence that you are in the same mental states as I am when I exhibit similar behavior—or, alternatively, by directly seeing your mental states. Only once I have identified you as a person, in this manner, is it possible for me to identify with you.

The engagement model promises us a different picture, one on which I know that you are a person because in light of your bodily and behavioral resemblance to myself, I *see* your embodied behavior *as* expressing the same kinds of mental states that I also tend to exhibit.¹⁷ Again, no purely intellectual belief about you (in relation to myself) is needed to effect the transition. I do not need to first form a belief about the resemblance between your body and behavior, on the one hand, and my body and behavior, on the other, or to then conclude, in a separate mental step, that you are a person. Rather, I can just *see* the likeness as such or perceptually recognize it in some other way. And when I do so, I simply find myself having certain dispositions to practical and affective responses toward your perspective. Why should

¹⁷ This criterion of correctness or veridicality for particular instances of seeing others as persons is of Wittgensteinian inspiration: 'Only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being,' Wittgenstein claims, 'can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious,' the idea being that we can only see a creature as having our form of mentality if it also has a corresponding kind of body (Wittgenstein 1953, 103e).

recognizing a fellow human being as a person depend on a classificatory belief to that effect when, plausibly, recognizing someone as a speaker of our native language does not?¹⁸

Thus, seeing our fellow human beings as persons counts as knowing that they are persons because the former partly consists in a kind of primitive identification with them in the light of their bodily and behavioral resemblance to ourselves. Through this act of identification with our fellows, their attitudes or aims are directly revealed to us in the medium of their behavior. Through the revelation of others' attitudes and/or aims, we come to grasp that others are susceptible to the same kinds of mental states that we have, that we share a form of mindedness with them.¹⁹ We come to see them as having the intellectual, volitional, and affective capacities that we do. No purely intellectual belief is needed, at least in this sort of case, to explain how this state of mind can possibly constitute knowledge that others are persons. The engagement model therefore enjoys a kind of epistemic parsimony that is not shared by the classification model.

5. Two Challenges to the Engagement Model

The comparison with the dispute between motivational judgment-internalists and -externalists allows us to anticipate some of the more pressing objections that might be raised against the engagement model. I will highlight what I see as the two strongest challenges to the view.

¹⁸ That is not to say that it we can always pick out the speakers of our native language easily. It may sometimes be difficult. Native speakers of our language can speak in unfamiliar dialects or with idiosyncratic pronunciation that might impede our ability to recognize them as speakers of our language. At this stage, we may need to appeal to classification in order to know that a particular interlocutor is speaking our language, to hear past the distinguishing feature of his dialect, so to speak. It is still plausible, however, that our original way of knowing that someone is speaking the same language as we are is by hearing his words as the words of our language.

¹⁹ It follows that to see a particular human being as a person we must see her as having the same kind of body we have. That point, however, would not imply that we cannot see human beings as persons when their bodies look very different from ours—amputees or people with severe physical disabilities, for example. Although certain human beings may have bodies that do not perfectly resemble our own, there is a more basic resemblance registered when we see them as persons, which is to say that we see that the bodies of these people exhibit modifications of the same kind of body that we ourselves have.

The first challenge begins with the indisputable fact that we are sometimes deeply indifferent to other persons yet that, by all accounts, we appear to see them as persons nevertheless. For we do not normally deny that they are, say, rational or self-conscious; on the contrary, if asked, we are ready to admit that they presumably have plans, thoughts, and feelings of their own, as we do. We simply lack concern for these people. And when our unconcern for others is sufficiently deep, it follows that we have no motive for treating them as persons. If this is right, then it would seem that we can recognize another as a person without having any such motives—hence that recognition of them as persons is only *extrinsically* related to these motives. Recognition of others as persons and person-specific concern for them are distinct existences, then, which may—and frequently do—come apart from one another in certain well-known circumstances. Thus, the engagement model is false. Call this the *challenge from indifference*.²⁰

A proponent of the engagement model would have to insist that a total lack of non-instrumental concern for someone's perspective constitutes a blind spot in our perception of that person. Just as our sight may be weak or occluded, yielding gaps in our perceptual experience of an object, so too can our interpersonal awareness be partial or deficient, yielding gaps in our experience of a person. Profound indifference to the perspectives of other persons consists precisely in the latter condition: a failure to properly or adequately see others as persons, conceived as distinct from—and compatible with—the belief or judgment that others are, in fact, persons. It would follow, then, that someone who took a purely instrumentalizing stance toward others does not have the same perception of their subjectivity as a basically decent person.

²⁰ The challenge from indifference is modeled on externalist challenges to motivational judgment-internalism which appeal to the possibility of amoralists: people who competently make moral judgments but show indifference to acting on them. See, for example, Brink 1997, 17–30; Svavarsdóttir 1999, 17–24; and Shafer-Landau 2003, 145–64.

The crux of the dispute is this. Why think that non-instrumental concern for a person's perspective—a susceptibility to sympathy and the reactive attitudes—is necessary for, or constitutive of, seeing her as a person? Surely, just as there are characters—amoralists—who make moral judgments yet lack all moral concern, aren't there characters—sociopaths—who are fully aware of others' humanity yet lack all non-instrumental concern for their perspectives?

Briefly, I do not think that these considerations give us special reasons for doubting the tenability of the engagement model. For one, we should not find irresistible the intuition that someone could be fully aware of another person's subjectivity while exhibiting no non-instrumental concern for her perspective. It should give us pause how profoundly *alien* this figure would seem to us. In taking only an instrumental interest in the minds of others, he would not be susceptible to sympathy or to the reactive attitudes, as these are forms of non-instrumental concern for others' perspectives. In this respect, he would even differ from many sociopaths, who do care minimally about others—in wanting to be feared or loved for its own sake, say. (Cruelty, too, presupposes non-instrumental concern for the perspective of another subject.) Such a person would regard others' minds in wholly functional terms, seeing their mental states as affectively and motivationally neutral data whose only significance lies in facilitating or impeding the realization of his ends; accordingly, he would treat others, in many respects, as sophisticated objects. It does not strike me as hyperbole or metaphor to call this sort of creature a solipsist. It seems apt to insist, instead, that he does not see others as persons but only as objects. Although he may acquire purely intellectual knowledge about their mental states and capacities, he is still missing something essential, just as the novice is missing something essential when she hears the jazz number not as music but as scattered noise; they hear the notes but not the music.²¹

²¹ McDowell 1998b, 85.

The second challenge, like the first, starts with a depressing observation: it is common for human beings to hold various hostile attitudes toward one another, including resentment, envy, hatred, and lust for vengeance. These attitudes can run deep in us, and they can—and often do—move us to treat others inhumanely, even for its own sake. But, of course, holding these attitudes toward others seems entirely consistent with taking them to be persons; in fact, our susceptibility to these forms of hostility presupposes some degree of interpersonal awareness on our part. So, we can recognize someone as a person yet have motives for treating her with hostility and perhaps cruelty. But in that case, recognizing others as persons turns out to be inextricably bound up not just with motives for treating them humanely but, typically, with motives for treating them inhumanely as well.²² With this concession, however, the engagement model seems to lose a great deal of its critical potential. In particular, it now seems unable to provide any critical analysis of the more familiar morally objectionable forms of hostility, such as racist or misogynistic attitudes, which do not seem to consist in a straightforward failure to see others as persons. If this is true of the engagement model, then, we must conclude that it cannot establish its favorite thick conception of interpersonal recognition as a suitable basis for moral complaints against, and social critique of, our inhumanity to others. Call this the *challenge from hostility*.

To answer this challenge and salvage the critical potential of the engagement model, we should admit that the morally objectionable hostile attitudes in question typically include some incipient awareness of their objects' humanity. The problem, in other words, is not just a kind of blindness to their perspective. The objectionably hostile agent's view of the other person differs from the indifferent agent's in that respect: his vision is warped or distorted, not just diminished.

²² Indeed, these modes of mistreatment would *count as* treating others as persons, by the lights of the engagement model, if they are motivated by non-instrumental concern for others' perspectives.

A proponent of the engagement model would have to argue that the perception that we have of someone's humanity when we are prepared to treat her with immoral hostility is not on a par with the perception that we have of her when we are prepared to treat her with moral decency. The argument could conceivably take many different forms. But one promising strategy would be to establish that the sorts of attitudes that motivate morally objectionable acts of interpersonal hostility contain an inherent contradiction or tension, which makes these attitudes self-defeating, irrational, or pathological; that the normal operation of these attitudes has the effect of alienating the one who holds them from other persons (if not also from herself) in profound and damaging ways; and that we escape the tension only if we come to see others in a more humane light.

Fully responding to the challenge from hostility would therefore require articulating and defending a particular substantive conception of what it is to recognize someone as a person—a task that is well beyond the scope of this paper. The trick would be to somehow chart a rational route to our adoption of a recognizably ethical outlook from what looks like rather sparse materials: the common forms of non-instrumental concern that we normally exhibit for the perspectives of other persons. Building a case of that kind would be a tightrope-walk, and not least because we must avoid building *only* moral motives into the conditions of recognizing someone as a person at the outset, lest the view collapse into the strong form of recognition-internalism that we rejected earlier. (See, for example, Manne 2018, 154, fn. 30.) My point is that it is an open question whether the second challenge can be made to stick, and that a proper reply to it will come from a more complete moral psychology of our inhumanity to others.

6. Conclusion: Interpersonal Recognition and the Prospects for Humanism

My goal in this essay has been to mount a partial defense of the engagement model. What commends the engagement model to our philosophical consideration, I have argued, is that a version of it gives us an attractive way of making sense of talk of interpersonal invisibility. Moreover, the engagement model better comports with the phenomenology of encountering and ignoring others, and this sort of view is more epistemically parsimonious than its rival.

While I have by no means formulated a complete conception of what it is to recognize others as persons, much less of interpersonal invisibility, what I have done is sketched a moral-psychological grid on which that conception and its competitors might illuminatingly be placed. Thus, I have recommended appropriating distinctions from the more familiar debate over whether moral judgment is essentially linked to moral motivation, in the service of mapping the constellation of positions on the nature of interpersonal recognition. This essay also doubles as a case for treating the nature of recognition as a topic for ethics, however. It matters to the overall shape of our ethical theorizing which conception of recognition we accept, particularly if we wish to shed light on the moral psychology of domination, objectification, and dehumanization.

I come at last to the question of whether the broader humanist project in the background of this paper is predicated on an unlicensed optimism that it would be advisable, on moral and political grounds, to reject. The worry is that we are indulging a fiction that is unrealistic and harmful if we think that merely seeing someone's humanity will lead us to treat her with basic consideration. This is unrealistic because recognition of a common humanity appears to be compatible with the most terrible inhumanity on our part, and it is harmful because it soothes us into supposing that all that we need in order to be decent to each other is to *really* be persuaded

that, say, members of a marginalized group are human after all. In other words, the alleged fiction deceives us into imagining that our political task is much simpler than it actually is.

One respect in which my project is *not* committed to excessive optimism is that I deny that merely internalizing the belief that some person or group is human will suffice to move us to treat them with moral decency. Recognizing someone as a person is not a matter of *believing* that she is a person but of *seeing* her as a person, where the latter state is, I have argued, essentially linked to modes of nonstrategic concern for that person's perspective. Because interpersonal recognition is a matter of our total orientation to other persons, it is overwhelmingly plausible that inducing people to take up this stance toward others will involve more than just convincing them of the humanity of their fellows. It will require reforming our ethical consciousness: reshaping the tangle of complex attitudes and responses to which we are prone vis à vis one another, which probably requires a corresponding reformation of our political institutions.

I am neither optimistic nor pessimistic about whether that undertaking will ever come to full fruition. What the humanist picture offers us is not a conception of what would *cause* a shift, on the individual or collective level, to a more humane outlook, but a conception of what the shift itself would consist in. Whether the humanist picture is tenable remains to be seen, of course. My point is that in light of the highlighted merits of the engagement model, the humanist picture looks promising enough to warrant sustained philosophical attention and investigation.²³

²³ I presented versions of this paper at the Speculative Ethics Forum at St. John University, a Royal Institute of Philosophy Conference on Personhood and Selfhood at the University of Manchester, and the Inhuman Gaze and Perceiving Otherwise Conference hosted by University College Dublin. I also presented earlier versions at workshops at Harvard University and the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics. I am grateful to audiences at these events. For extended discussion of the ideas of this paper, I would like to thank Olivia Bailey, Marie-Luisa Frick, Rafeeq Hasan, James Jardine, Douglas Lavin, Matthew Lindauer, Richard Moran, Ronni Gura Sadovsky, Leonie Smith, Michael Smith, and Leo Zaibert. For discussion and substantive, frequently detailed written comments on earlier drafts, I am grateful to Emad Atiq, who was my commentator at the Speculative Ethics Forum, as well as to Adriana Alfaro Altamirano, Selim Berker, Matthew Boyle, Byron Davies, Kyla Ebels-Duggan, Jeremy Fix, Frances Kamm, David Kaspar, Christine Korsgaard, Douglas Kremm, Oded Na'aman, Patricia Marechal, Wendy Salkin, Susanna Siegel, Zeynep Soysal, and Beth Truesdale.

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