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"Did He Love?" On the Indeterminacy of the Mental and Uncertainty in Ethical Relations

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Abstract

Several philosophers attached to the research environment at Åbo Akademi University have turned to Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophical psychology to clarify what an investigation of ethics could entail in the light of his later thought. They have thus heeded the advice of Elizabeth Anscombe to bring out the evaluative features of the psychological concepts inherent in all moral philosophical studies, before attempting to offer a normative moral theory. In this paper, I consider Lars Hertzberg's suggestion that we may be helped by thinking of our use of psychological concepts as characterized by a kind of indeterminacy and ask what implications this has for the certainty or uncertainty one person may experience concerning what another thinks and feels. Reconsidering his example of a widow, who, looking back on her life, asks whether her husband loved her and feels distraught about not knowing what to make of what she has in terms of "evidence," I ask what her question, and the questions she does not ask, reveal about the indeterminacy of the mental, and about the kind of ethical or existential attitude she seems unable to take towards her deceased husband and their shared life.

Several philosophers attached to the research environment at Åbo Akademi University have turned to Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophical psychology to clarify what an investigation of ethics could entail in the light of his later thought. They have thus heeded the advice of Elizabeth Anscombe in "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1981, 26) to bring out the evaluative features of the psychological concepts inherent in all moral philosophical studies, before attempting to offer a normative moral theory.

In this paper, I consider Lars Hertzberg's (1983; 1994) suggestion that our use of psychological concepts is characterized by a kind of indeterminacy and

ask what implications this has for the certainty or uncertainty one person may experience concerning what another thinks and feels. Reconsidering his example of a widow, who looks back on her life, and asks whether her husband loved her, I ask what her question, and the questions she does not ask, reveal about the indeterminacy of the mental. What kind of ethical or existential attitude does she seem unable to take towards her deceased husband and their shared life when she feels distress at not knowing what to make of what knowledge she has of him in terms of "evidence"? This allows me to explore themes in Wittgenstein's philosophy that point to similarities in the *form* psychological and aesthetic judgements take, but also actualise specific ethical difficulties. These difficulties have been emphasised by Hannes Nykänen and Joel Backström (Backström 2013; 2019, Backström & Nykänen 2016, Nykänen 2019), and show up when we consider the priority of the question whether *someone* loved to the question when and whether it is possible to determine that *something* is love.

In section one, I first consider the need in philosophy to think through examples, as emphasized by Hertzberg. I then introduce his example of the widow and discuss how it illuminates key insights in Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology. An important outcome of this discussion is the connections forged between psychological and aesthetic judgements. In both types of judgement, there is a possibility of fitting a person's words, actions and reactions into different meaningful wholes. In section two, I discuss alternative ways of reading the example of the widow and show how our understanding of it may change by altering her question. Elaborating on themes raised by Backström and Nykänen, I consider ethical and existential aspects of her question, which shed light on the indeterminacy involved in thinking about love as a moral psychological concept but are also constitutive of the meaning someone is able to see in life.

1. On thinking through examples

One of the most important things I have learnt about philosophy from Lars Hertzberg is the significance of thinking through examples. Bringing one's thinking in contact with the particularities of concrete language use allows one to see the many paths one may go down when establishing the connections that may obtain between different uses of a word. Attending to the intricacies of a real or imagined conversation may also help one see the roots of one's

perhaps conflicting intuitions about what one *could*, *would* or *should* say in response to a specific philosophical question. Often, attending to an example also questions one's initial sense of what using a word in a specific situation *must* mean (cf. PI: §§ 66, 97, 101, 131, 197, 352, 437, 599). Learning to attend to language in this manner, then, is one way in which one can come to experience the open-endedness of philosophical inquiry and indeed of life itself. Furthermore, it is a way of facing our responsibility as philosophers for acknowledging this open-endedness, not pretending that the philosophical journey necessarily must end at one's predetermined destination.

Working one's way through an example thus serves at least two purposes in the philosophical practice. First, it is an important part of the *philosophical* work one needs to do to reach clarity about a question, offering ways of challenging and testing one's thought. Second, it is a significant part of the *pedagogical* work necessary to make one's philosophical work understood by others. The example gives one something to hold on to and look jointly at in conversation with others.

Yet, examples may also figure in one's thought in a third way. After having reflected on a myriad of examples, some may stand out as paradigmatic in capturing a distinct philosophical or personal challenge. Iris Murdoch's depiction of the perhaps snobbish mother-in-law M's re-evaluation of her daughter in-law D has, for instance, come to live a life on its own as an example of what is involved in a just and loving attention directed at an independent reality. M's attempt to question her assumptions and "look again" at D allows her to see D not just as juvenile, but refreshingly youthful (Murdoch 1997: 312–318).[1] These examples are not used by the authors to show the complexities of an issue. Rather they imprint a distinct understanding on their reader, the attitude to or vision of another which their authors want to commend. Thus, these cases show how particular examples may become exemplary in one's thought. They are not just a tool for thinking, something to think through, but the fixed points around which one's thinking turns.

[1] For recent discussion of the example, see Düringer 2023, Forsberg 2017, 2018, Hämäläinen 2022, Panizza 2022. See also Gaita (1999: 57–59) for an example of racism, where another M fails to respond to a racialised other's plight with love.

1.1. "Given the same evidence"

Hertzberg's example of a widow who asks whether her husband loved her is not as well-known as Murdoch's example. This is unfortunate, since for good reasons it has become paradigmatic in my own thinking about love. In itself, however, it does not illustrate the real value of working with examples, since it does not consider how this doubt enters her life and her conversations with others. It is mainly used by Hertzberg to illustrate what he in an earlier article calls the "indeterminacy of the mental" (1983).[2] With reference to Wittgenstein, he uses it to discuss what it could mean to provide evidence for something being love or to agree on standards for correctly applying the word "love" to a person's behaviour. The example reads, in full,

> Imagine a widow looking back at her married life, asking herself whether her husband really loved her. On one side she thinks about his concern, his tenderness and patience with her, his joy in her company; on the other side she thinks of their quarrels, his sarcasm, the times when he was bored with her or seemed to forget she existed. Had there been real love in their life, or had there not? Which were the occasions on which he had shown her his true feelings? Could his coldness be explained as due to the strains and burdens of his everyday life? Did the monotony of their daily life together make him overlook her need for affection? Was he too shy or preoccupied to express his true feelings? Or was his occasional tenderness, on the contrary, just a matter of habit, or a calculated effort to keep her from leaving him, or was it simply that he lacked the courage to disappoint her? Or was he equally close to both sides? It is not that she is looking for more evidence; rather, she does not know what to make of what she has. (1994: 137; a slightly shorter version appears in Hertzberg 1989: 97–98)

What Hertzberg wants to show is first, what it means, with Wittgenstein, to say that there is a constitutional uncertainty in our use of psychological concepts. Wittgenstein appeals to this uncertainty when he writes "… the uncertainty is constitutional. It is not a shortcoming. It resides in our concepts that this uncertainty exists, in our instrument" (RPP II: § 657). That the uncertainty is constitutional does not mean that we can never be certain or that we are always uncertain about what someone feels or really thinks. Nor does it mean that our use of these words are necessarily vague. We are often certain as to what another thinks or feels, and it may require quite special circumstances to question our sense of certainty. Wittgenstein, for instance, rejects certain ideas of doubting (another's pain) as nonsense (e.g. OC: § 10)

[2] This notion, according to Hertzberg, had been suggested to him by Peter Winch.

and also points to situations in which neither I nor you entertain doubts about what someone feels (LWPP I: § 978; RPP II: §§ 602–3). The constitutional uncertainty is thus not a consequence of there being something, primarily something inner, which gives meaning to our words but is hidden from us either in principle or in practice (cf. Cockburn 2009, Crary 2016). Rather, the whole idea of a hidden inner only surfaces in the context of different forms of mistrust or suspicion, which make us question whether we really know what is going on with someone (cf. Backström 2013: 226–228). Thus, the kind of mistrust that may lead a wife to look for evidence that her husband did not mean what he said when he told her that he loved her does not present us with the default case, where no question arises as to whether the tenderness we feel and see in another's voice and eyes is really there (see Z: § 225 on seeing emotion personified in another's face).

The uncertainty, as Wittgenstein says, rather lies in our instrument, a notion added in the above quote to explain what it means that it lies in our concepts (RPP II: § 657). The indeterminacy of psychological concepts is therefore an aspect of the different uses we can make of words like love in particular contexts, to, say, promise someone always to love, persuade someone not to leave, profess the greatness of our emotion or pretend it was love to begin with. Thereby, the indeterminacy also lies in us, in how we wield the word in relation to others, carefully, cautiously, conscientiously, cunningly. We are thus to an extent part of the instrument and part of what may add to any perceived uncertainty in how the word is used. It is thus important to register that the doubt entertained by the widow is her doubt, expressive of her attempt to make sense of the relationship with her husband as one of love; her husband then or their children now may not entertain any doubt.

However, as indicated by the possibility of making different uses of words, it is important to capture the relevant sense of indeterminacy here. Why is it, as Hertzberg notes, that his having said "I love you" to her, or his writing "I love her" in a diary she now reads, need not have answered her doubt (1994: 137–138, fn 4)? Søren Kierkegaard provides a first answer to this, when he remarks:

> There is no word in human language, not a single one, not the most sacred word, of which we could say: when a man uses this word, it is unconditionally proved thereby that there is love in him. Rather, it is true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him and the opposite word from another can

> convince us that there is love in him also. It is true that one and the same word can convince us that love dwells in the person who uttered it and not in another who nevertheless uttered the same word. (Kierkegaard 1962: 30)

It may thus have been true that her husband said he loved her, but from this fact does not follow by logical necessity that he did love. The words neither determine the meaning of what he said, nor whether his words were expressive of 'love'. To address the questions of meaning this raises, we therefore need to consider (1) what he meant when he said it: what he intended with the words, what was the purpose as well as the result of him saying it—to convince her, to convince himself—, and (2) whether he meant what he said, whether he was truthful, which raises a question of sincerity. To respond to these questions, we need to relate his saying "I love you" to other things he said and did. We therefore need to attend to the relations between (1) the descriptions of the husband's words and behaviour, which Hertzberg brings out as pertinent but not sufficient for determining whether he loved or not, whether he showed signs of joy, tenderness and attentive concern, or rather anger, impatience or boredom, and (2) the overarching attribution of love, or not love, to him in the light of these descriptions.

Attributing "love", or "not love", to him, on the basis of such descriptions, may seem a matter of course since we appear to be able to explicate the meaning of love by saying, for instance, "Love means taking a tender concern in the other's well-being, taking joy in their company, or being patient with their frustrations and shortcomings". Yet, although as philosophers we might want to think of this "means" as pointing to a logical implication ("If *x* loves *y*, then *x* will relate to *y* in *n* ways"), we cannot predict, nor conclude, what this will amount to in a concrete case we recognize as love. Neither does the conclusion that someone does not love follow strictly from pointing to moments where their concern, joy or patience, are lacking. Of course, we can, as a researcher in empirical psychology might do, stipulate a meaning along these lines, by giving a definition that specifies, say, ten criteria of love, and decide to call love all those cases that fulfill six of the criteria. Yet, the answer to the widow's question cannot be resolved in such a way, even if a scientific community reached some degree of consensus on what criteria to include in their definition of "love" (cf. Kronqvist 2019).

The certainty that the widow's children, by contrast to her, can experience regarding their father's love for their mother cannot thus be reached as the

logical conclusion of a deductive argument. This would make their certainty similar to the one provided by a proof in mathematics, where the conclusion has to be accepted as logically certain or necessarily true, since we cannot reach a false conclusion from true premises. The uncertainty that the widow experiences, however, is also not the outcome of the inconclusiveness of an inductive argument, where more evidence only makes the hypothesis more probable.

The "indeterminacy of the mental" is thus related to the possibility of saying, as Wittgenstein does, with regard to the language game concerning expressions of emotions: "Given the same evidence, one person can be completely convinced and another not be. We don't on that account exclude either one from society, as being unaccountable and incapable of judgement" (RPP II: §§ 684–5).[3] This point, reminiscent of the one by Kierkegaard above, has resurfaced in my and Hertzberg's conversations. As I remember Hertzberg's words, it is possible for a person to review a list of observations about another's behaviour and say, in one case, "He loves me" and, in another case, "He does not love me". Any justification such evidence can offer to the claims "He loves me" or "He loves me not," then, is different from the way in which support is offered for a hypothesis. This also makes speaking about evidence in this context more strained than the quotes by Hertzberg and Wittgenstein initially suggest. It is not only that the widow won't be helped by "more evidence" (Hertzberg 1994: 137). Construing the relation between her being able to say with confidence that her husband loved her and her adjacent ways of conceiving his words, acts and behaviour, as a relation between hypothesis and evidence leads us astray.

1.2. "What to make of what she has"

Hertzberg's suggestion that her struggle can be captured as a failure of knowing "what to make of what she has" (1994: 137) indicates why her problem cannot be solved by putting it into an argumentative form. This is something that Hertzberg's example shares with Murdoch's M and D and is further augmented by the fact that both D and the widow's husband are dead. Thinking of D as dead enables Murdoch (1997: 312) to suggest that the question of how M

[3] Cf. Gaita (1999: 160) on cranks and the unthinkable for an elucidation of why the option of excluding someone from society, or a serious conversation, seems to figure in Wittgenstein's thought.

envisions D matters even if M is not in a position to meet D and learn things that would, as it were, add to the "evidence". Instead, everything important "happens entirely in M's mind" (Murdoch 1997: 312). Both M and the widow are thus asked to respond to what appears as a limited whole, the person's world or life perceived as a "totality of facts" (cf. Appelqvist 2023: 10). Faced with a determinate set of actions and reactions, their question is to find the over-arching description that is most "fitting" to "the facts" (cf. Beran 2023).

To speak of the description "fitting the facts", however, fails to display a peculiarity in the way we perceive meaningful patterns (PPF: §§ 2, 362), or *Gestalts* (cf. Wittgenstein's reference to Köhler, PPF: § 177), in our life in these cases (cf. PPF: §§ 116, 118). A widow in the same context as Hertzberg's widow but secure in *seeing* her husband's actions and reactions *as* love would emphasize his "joy", "tenderness" and "patience" as expressions of his love, and explain away his "coldness" or apparent "disregard" for her by referring to the "pressures of everyday life", or by taking them to exemplify individual characteristics such as "shyness" or "reserve". Another widow convinced by *his lack or failure to love*, however, would *see* their "quarrels", his "sarcasm" or "impatience" *as* parts of a different kind of whole, as lack of genuine concern. As the beak of the duck and the ears of the rabbit in the famous duck-rabbit (PPF: § 118), the meaning of the parts, the so-called "evidence", is hence determined by their place in each perceived whole; the internal relations between the parts are formed by our understanding of the whole to which they belong (Wittgenstein PPF: § 247).

In these respects, the indeterminacy of psychological judgements resembles the indeterminacy of aesthetic judgements (cf. LA: I: 8–9, 36, IV; Hertzberg 2022: ch. 13). To recognize an aspect of a figure, to "*see it as* something else", may depend both on a sense of imagination and a certain amount of creativity (PPF: §§ 254–256). One's seeing may also deepen through familiarity and conversation (cf. Appelqvist 2023: 39; LA: I: 15). Hertzberg's widow's question thus turns on the possibility of seeing individual features of her husband's behaviour as fitting into two different meaningful wholes. "He gave her a tired look" can form part of both "the pressures of work had tired him out" and "he had grown increasingly tired of her" (cf. Anscombe 1981: 22–25, 28–29). By contrast to the imagined widows who continuously see his behaviour under one aspect, however, Hertzberg's widow is drawn between two ways of seeing him.

In this difficulty of settling on one whole, her problem extends beyond the concerns ordinarily raised by aesthetic judgements. If the widow's problem was only a problem of choosing between two ways of seeing her husband's behaviour, a matter of taste (Hertzberg 1994: 137–138), we may ask why she does not just opt for seeing him as loving her, or simply leave it open? This fails to grasp the ways in which the matter is important to her, how it is that the "very strength to go on living might depend on her being able to tell herself that her husband had loved her" (Hertzberg 1994: 137). This opens for ethical and existential aspects of the indeterminacy of our psychological concepts.

Now, by contrast to Kierkegaard, who explicitly offers his reflection in the context of a meditation on love, and the role of love in a good life, a life in the service of God or the Good through the love of others (Kierkegaard 1962: 23f, 153f, cf. Strandberg 2013), Hertzberg does not develop the connection between the constitutive indeterminacy of psychological concepts to ethical or existential questions. He only suggests that it would be good if the widow could come to see that there is no unique answer to her question (Hertzberg 1994: 142), and that her predicament is not epistemological but indicates a problem of life (Hertzberg 1994: 151). For him, reflection on the "indeterminacy of the mental" then primarily serves as a logical, or more broadly, in line with Wittgenstein's later work, grammatical recollection (PI: § 127) of our uses of psychological concepts, illuminating ways in which our lives in these contexts is different from the lives we lead in the contexts of mathematical proofs or empirical observations. It is thus meant as a reminder to the philosopher or scientist inclined to overdetermine the meaning of psychological concepts by trying to fit them into their pre-conceived theory of what these concepts *must* be like. In these respects, this reminder is similar in kind to Quine's reflections on the "underdetermination of theory" (1975).

Hertzberg's treatment of the example thus turns on the possibility of fitting different descriptions of a person's words, feelings and behaviour, into different meaningful wholes. If, however, we take seriously Hertzberg's suggestion that the widow is not just philosophically confused about how to fit the word love to her husband's behaviour, but is facing a problem of life, and the frightening possibility that their life might have been loveless, reflection on the example may also open for a deepened understanding of the kind of difficulties she is facing, and of what may be entailed in thinking about them as ethical or existential. We therefore need to move from thinking about the

relations that may uphold between different sentences, to how she perceives their relationship, and how her ways of experiencing their life together contributes to whether she finds her life meaningful as a whole. Considering the example in this light becomes especially pertinent, when bearing in mind that the constitutive indeterminacy of psychological concepts, for Wittgenstein, does not depend upon us always being uncertain about the meaning of our relationships to others, but rather presupposes ways of being responsive to each other as living, thinking and feeling beings. The uncertainty experienced by the widow is in that light not due to the indeterminacy of psychological concepts but is an aspect of how she is able to respond meaningfully to her now deceased husband. These are the aspects of the widow's uncertainty I turn to next.

2. Reconsidering the widow and her husband

To discern what matters of ethical or existential concern there could be in the widow's question, we may try to imagine the circumstances that make her raise it. Was it something someone said or did? Was it a gnawing doubt that had plagued her in their relationship that came back with renewed force after his death, or was it a more recent suspicion, suddenly triggered by coming across a new document, a letter to an old lover, a note in a diary? I will, however, move forward with the example by entering a different path. Reflecting on four questions Hertzberg does not have her ask, I analyse what these questions reveal about both her uncertainty and her possibilities of saying something more determinate about their relationship. The four questions I discuss are: (1) Was he a good husband? (2) Should she have married him? (3) Did she love? (4) Was she loved? Whereas the first two point to questions that may seem moral in a more narrow sense, centering on what one ought to do if one loves, the latter two point to more convoluted ethical and existential concerns raised by reflections on what it means to love and be loved. I mark out the discussion of each question with a new section, even if the topics flow into each other.

2.1. Was he a good husband?

Hertzberg points to some rough edges or possible imperfections in the husband's demeanor towards his wife, but he gives us no reason to think that the husband failed to be, according to standards fitting the time of writing, a "dutiful husband". Nor do we need to assume that he tended to his

responsibilities as a husband in a less than caring way. We may even imagine, as in the case of Murdoch's M, him behaving beautifully throughout their relationship (1997: 312) and still understand the widow if she says that she doubts whether she ever fully felt his love.

What allows for such an understanding is the realization that love does not consist in merely fulfilling one's duties or doing what one has promised to do. As Christopher Cowley shows, the responsibility taken for another in love is open-ended, by contrast to the fixed responsibility of predefined task (Cowley 2021). Rather, a certain type of spontaneous *responsiveness* to the other is required for us to think of him as loving her. This may lead us back to thinking of love as an inner, possibly hidden, experience, but a reason for resisting this temptation is that love, as Wittgenstein repeatedly insists, "is not a feeling" but "put to the test" (RPP I: § 959; Z: § 504). We may, with Wittgenstein, well picture this as a test of love's "inner character" (RPP I: § 115) but reaching clarity about this inner character does not approximate becoming more certain of a hypothetical inner event. Rather, the question of love's "inner character" raises a question about the genuineness of a person's love, whether the husband's "heart was in it", or whether he, as Backström says (2019: 246), was "wholehearted" in his love for her.

We therefore misdescribe the widow's uncertainty if we describe her as not knowing that he had the requisite feeling of love (for how could that be determined?). Her uncertainty is better captured as a question of whether she really knew him (cf. Hertzberg 1994: 122, in relation to trust), whether he was present to her in his actions and reactions. Did he address her, as Backström puts it, leaning on Wittgenstein,

> —with an open look, an open face which holds nothing back, whether gladness, sadness, or anger—[showing] that there is nothing hidden between [them] but rather […] "as if he became transparent to [her] through [his] human ... expression" (LWPP II, p. 67). (Backström 2013: 227)

These remarks point to a form of emotional expressiveness and responsiveness in interpersonal encounters that is central when reflecting on the meaning of mental language (see Cockburn 2009 for an illuminating discussion). The centrality of this responsiveness is seen first in the way in which the language-games involving psychological concepts grow out of pre-linguistic (immediate or unmediated) reactions and responses. As Wittgenstein says, "a language game is based on it [this behaviour], that it is the prototype

of a way of thinking and not the result of thought" (Z: § 541). The centrality of this responsiveness is also seen in that we often take a person's expressive behaviour (Cockburn 1922: 76) – when it is not restrained by an attempt to hide oneself (cf. Backström 2013: 227–229) – to reveal their true standing to us. We take love, as Kierkegaard also says, to show itself not in words and deeds alone, but in *how* they are spoken and done (1962: 30). At given moments, it is precisely the *how* of the matter – the shine in your eyes, the tremble in your voice – that reveals your words as expressive of love, or even true love, for me.[4]

Yet, acknowledging the sometimes instant elimination of all possible doubt about what someone feels, in sensing their touch, catching their eye, hearing the tone of their voice, as well as the constitutive role of doubt in these language games, does not warrant the claim that any felt uncertainty on the widow's part when thinking of their relationship as a whole shows that her husband did not love or at least did not love whole-heartedly. It only constitutes a background against which her doubt is meaningful. A reason for holding on to a sense of indeterminacy, then, is that the question of whether he loved her cannot be determined by *her* feelings alone. Her answer needs to involve at least some consideration of how *he* thought of their relationship, whether, in trying to be a good husband, he took himself to be *acting out* of love.

This phrase, "acting out of love", turns on two possible ways in which someone can be seen as *acting lovingly*. The first connects love to being moved by a feeling, which relates to the form of responsiveness discussed above, an immediate sensitivity to the other that is unmeditated by thought (cf. Winch 1972: 181). The second connects love with acting for a reason, where love in part involves a sensed responsibility for the other. This sensed need to act responsibly, to take responsibility for the relationship with the other, may well be born out of an unmediated responsiveness to the other; the responsiveness is in these respects the source from which their thinking of their sensed responsibility springs. Yet, in every situation someone acts responsibly, they need not act out of an immediately felt response to the other. Thinking about

[4] Backström (2023) therefore suggests that at the heart of human encounters there is a certainty of being related to another, which I cannot question without in some way being deceptive or withdrawing myself from the other as a You. He describes this certainty as an openness to the other (cf. Backström and Nykänen 2016), which serves as the opposite of the problematic picture of hiddenness of the mental Wittgenstein sought to expose (Backström 2013). This picture, as it were, only starts to attract us when the possibility of openness is denied (Backström 2019; Nykänen 2019).

their responsibility in the particular relationship, as well as the kind of relationship they are in, such as "husband to wife", may itself move them to action, momentarily leading them to suppress or overcome their most pressing bodily responses. By repeatedly acting responsibly in such ways, their way of responding to the other may also become habitual, breeding new forms of responsiveness that no longer need to be guided by thought. (Cf. Wittgenstein on how the "words exchanged by lovers", although "loaded with feelings", are not necessarily "innate", but "instilled, and yet *assimilated*", LWPP I: § 712.)

2.2. Should she have married him?

In Hertzberg's example, the widow asks herself whether there had "been real love in their life, or […] not?" (Hertzberg 1994: 137). She does not, however, question her decision to marry him or her reasons for doing so. A reason for her not questioning this may be that not only her conception of him, and him loving her, has changed, but that also her perception of marriage may have changed, even after his death. Picture for instance the widow looking at the interactions between her daughter and son-in-law and suddenly being struck by not sharing that kind of love with her husband. Her son-in-law S perhaps touches the daughter with an unexpected tenderness or speaks openly of concerns regarding her and their children, which strikes her as different from her husband's way of relating to her. Perhaps her husband was more reserved when it came to public expressions of affection and perhaps his ways of responding to her were also more contained in private. Perhaps they had grown up during a time and in a culture that was generally more reserved. Looking back on their life, she may therefore ask whether his reserved manners were mainly the result of his time and upbringing, reflecting a mere social form, or whether they expressed something more prominent about his character.

Such questions do not have a determinate answer, but it is important to recognize that they do not only have a backward-looking function, concerning what had been most formative for his way of responding to her, and her to him. They also raise questions about the future they are now unable to share. Seeing in her daughter's relationship a different "form of life" (PI: § 19), a new possibility for thinking about the expressions that love may take, she might wonder about the way her husband would have reacted to S. Would he have scoffed at the follies of the younger generation or would he have found himself at home in these new ways of being and speaking that now strike her as

increasingly attractive? Looking back on her life, she perhaps finds herself longing for such a response from him and wonders whether he would have shared such a longing.

The widow's question here turns on the realization that marriage has taken different forms over time. Against the background of these shifting social forms, we may come to think that whatever is called marriage at a given place and time is merely a culturally and historically determined form that love can but need not take. *Pace* Sinatra, in the song "Love and Marriage", we may therefore remain content that we can "have one without the other". We may even feel that the social form of their relationship adds nothing of importance to the question whether they truly loved, and that a pre-occupation with form detracts from the real question by reducing it to a matter of collective norms and values (cf. Backström 2007: 113; Backström & Nykänen 2016; Nykänen 2015: 53–54). If we for example picture the husband's concern with being a good husband as a mere concern with fitting a pre-determined social form, we feel disquieted, because his main concern seems to be with playing a part, with looking good to others, rather than inquiring into what is good in relation to his wife. Behaving in this manner turns his relationship with her into a performance that seems motivated by largely *aesthetic* concerns. Does he only wish to appear good to fit into his social group?

However, the desire to be a good husband can also serve as an *ethical* motivation, in expressing the husband's desire to take responsibility for her and their relationship, to do his share in their joint life. The notion of "being a good husband", in this context, does not have to be seen as contingent on his desire, as "merely conventional" or a social play to the gallery. Rather, this notion may offer him the opportunity to consider the form his responsibility should take in relation to her. Similarly, the widow's question about what her marriage was and is, what she conceived of as a good marriage when marrying him, and what she would conceive as a good reason for marrying him now, cannot be thought of merely in terms of shifting social forms. However conventional her reasons for marrying him were, her relationship to him provides her with an opportunity to develop and deepen her understanding of what it means to be married. In these respects, every marriage, as Stanley Cavell (1981) has it, can be conceived as a remarriage: it asks us to consider and constantly reconsider what is involved in our commitments.

Reflecting on what it means to be a "husband", "wife" and on what "marriage" is, may thus be an aspect of the ethical formation of them as lovers (cf. Lear 2003: 38). Though this deepening of their understanding of love and marriage can never be reduced to simply adopting a contemporary social form, the form their personal relationship takes can be seen as in constant dialogue with historically and culturally specific social forms. As in the imagined case with S, the widow's changing understanding of "marriage" may be the result of her personally coming to see "love" in patterns of response she earlier had not reckoned with. The experience sets an example of what love could be that comes to guide her understanding and may also contribute to social changes in the way she continues thinking and talking about love and marriage. Her personal question as to whether there had been "real love in their life" may, however, also reflect a social transformation in the ways the commitments and responsibilities of marriage, as well as potential reasons for marrying, are discussed within her culture (cf. Hämäläinen 2022), revealing how love for now is the only socially accepted reason for marrying.

2.3. Did she love?

Why was the widow so concerned with knowing whether he loved her, as if that could be determined from a third person perspective? If love, from an ethical perspective, addresses us with questions of responsibility in the first person, should not the morally salient question for her instead be whether she was wholehearted in her love for him (cf. Backström 2023: 83)? Should we, as philosophers, perhaps also question our own interest in logical form, ethical formation, and the role of social transformation for conceptual change, as a deflection from, perhaps even a repression of, the understanding of the other as a you that is available in opening ourselves to each other (Backström 2019: 248; Nykänen 2019: 337)?

Raised as questions of conscience (cf. Nykänen 2019), constitutively in the first person, these are pertinent questions. They highlight that the widow is no mere bystander to his love but a participant in a relationship, in which "understanding oneself and understanding the other are interdependent" (Nykänen 2019: 337). One of the ethical questions the widow needs to ask herself is thus whether her way of posing the question reveals a failure to truthfully consider her own motivations for raising it. As philosophers, attending to her questions, we also need to keep the possibility of her deceiving

herself about her reasons open. Yet, precisely because our understanding of ourselves and others are interdependent in cases like hers, we cannot, philosophically, rule out the possibility that it is her love for him that makes her raise the question as a concern about his love. The question whether he loved may torture her precisely because she has become aware of something in herself that appears to be potentially self-deceptive. Addressing the question of whether he loved can in such a context be her way of taking responsibility, by considering her own involvement in their relationship, of trying to do justice to him and his perhaps differing understanding of their relationship.

Murdoch's advice to direct a just and loving gaze at an independent reality (1997: 312–318), at once conjoining love with questions of justice, here also raises a question to us as philosophers attempting to analyze the ethical meaning of a question raised within an example. Her wording suggests that a loving gaze not only involves the attempt to truthfully conceive the matter, by seeing the possibility of self-deception at the root of our moral difficulties. It also involves the effort of being fair to the other, although in an imagined example, reflecting on what it would mean to address *her*, the widow, with our understanding of the difficulties she is facing. And since we, in our reflection, are no mere by-standers but stand in relation to the one we are addressing, we are asked to consider what our analysis of *her* question, whatever form it takes, says about *us*, and our possible conviction of what it must mean.

This actualizes anew the requirement to respond responsibly to another's individuality, and the ethical implications of responding in such a way on the analysis we as philosophers may offer of the possible meanings of 'love'. If our investigation does not involve the recognition that another's question, even in an imagined example, could also challenge our understanding of what an ethical problem could be, we need to ask whether we are indeed pressing the question, and the one asking it, into a pre-given form.

2.4. Was she loved?

The answer to the question "Was she loved?" may seem inherent to the answer to the question Hertzberg lets her ask, "Did he love her?" Yet, speaking about her "feeling his love" reveals an interesting ambiguity. The widow might have been confident that "he loved her", perhaps even confident that "she loved him". Yet, she may have been uncertain about whether "she felt loved" in their relationship. Here it may be superfluous to add "by him", since her reflection

may as well have involved her ways of relating to a range of others: parents, other partners, friends. We may start unpacking this ambiguity by marking a distinction between "believing *that* he loved her" and "believing *in* his love". Where the first expression draws attention to how truthful he was in telling her he loved her and to how fitting it would be to describe his attitude to and commitments towards her as love, the second expression attends to a possible failure in her attitude not just to him, but to life, and to love, as a whole; a feeling perhaps of "not fitting in". What is missing from her in such a case may not be trust in him telling the truth, nor doubts about her own truthfulness, but a faith in him as well as herself as concerns the possibility of thinking of her life and their life together as good. Speaking of *being loved* by contrast to *loving* thus suggests a way of thinking and being that does not proceed from the certainty *that* the other loves but builds on the possibility of resting assured *in* their love (cf. BEE: MS 133,8r[2]).

In these respects, the widow's question may reveal not just her potential lovelessness, her evasion of truthfulness, which could be seen as her main *ethical difficulty* (cf. Backström and Nykänen 2016: 3; Backström 2019: 256; Backström 2023: 94). It may also reveal a form of *existential despair*, a failure to see her life with him as meaningful. To mark a distinction between the ethical and the existential here is to distinguish a *problem of the will,* our not wanting to do something we know is right or being tempted to do something we know is wrong, which I think Backström (2023: 77 fn 1, 94–95) and Nykänen (Backström & Nykänen 2016: 3) correctly diagnose as characteristic of our main ethical difficulties, from a *problem of life* (Hertzberg 1994: 151). To this one could object that a problem of the will is simultaneously a problem of life. I agree, I only want to submit that not all problems of life are problems of the will. The problem of life I envision here is then rather one of being, or to some extent believing (in), where one's main challenge is the ability of seeing meaning, or of grasping one's life, when considered as a whole, as meaningful (cf. Pacovská 2024). Thus, one's difficulty does not concern *doing* a good one recognizes as good, but being able to think of one's relations to others, to life, and to oneself *as* good.

Two significant aspects of such a failure to see meaning can be seen in the widow's struggle. On the one hand, the struggle to determine the meaning of their relationship can involve her vacillating between perspectives: whatever temporary meaning she succeeds in attributing to him, she constantly falls back

into doubt, into despair. On the other hand, she may struggle to catch hold of any meaning in her life, not to speak of seeing it as forming a meaningful whole. This can be an aspect of her grief, including the realization that although he did love her, he is no longer there to carry her. The question posed to her is then not to think of his life as a whole and determine whether there was love in it, but to find new ways of going on living with him now that he is gone. This may require her to be able to think of their shared life together as good, finding ways of forgiving both him and herself for occasional failures and shortcomings. Such is, however, the power of grief that it sometimes robs us even of that possibility. Love that was once there, surrounding us with its presence, is now lost. This itself may be enough to despair.

3. Conclusion

I brought in Hertzberg's notion of the indeterminacy of the mental to address what at first glance might seem to be a specialized problem in the philosophy of psychology and the sciences of the mind. Is it, as it were, possible to theoretically determine what another thinks, feels or intends, in a manner similar to how we support a hypothesis with evidence, prove the validity of a logical argument, or stipulate definitions that determine what we are able to see as falling under a concept (cf. Kronqvist 2019)? The discussion has shown that the philosophical implications of Hertzberg's notion are much more wide-ranging than this first rendition suggests. Attempts to describe the human mind always involve reflection on ourselves, on who we are, and on what it is possible for us to think about our lives, our future and our shared past. A discussion of the indeterminacy of the mental thus opens for the possibility of seeing our lives from different perspectives, connecting this feature of our language use to the creativity and imagination we attribute to aesthetic judgements, but also to the deeply existential and moral questions raised by acknowledging our human freedom.

Hertzberg's example may at first appear as just one example of the indeterminacy of a psychological concept. It is, however, an odd coincidence (lucky but seemingly unlikely) that it turns on our understanding of love. Reflections on love alert us both to the kind of emotional responsiveness to another that is necessary for our language games involving psychological concepts to get off the ground and to our responsibility for how we engage with others in our relationships while using these concepts. Love, furthermore,

is connected to the ability to think of our lives as meaningful and good, not because we find a distanced point of view from which we can regard them as a whole, but because we find ways of being with another person that place us in relation to something that extends beyond our individual being. Such a possibility is epitomized in thinking of love in terms of something in which we can rest secure, as something making us feel safe (cf. BEE: MS 133,8r[2], LE: 8, Kronqvist 2012).

I wanted the discussion to show how fruitful reflecting on the indeterminacy of the mental can be for both psychologists and various philosophers (epistemologists as well as ethicists), who consider the problem facing the widow from a third person perspective. However, by considering the widow's problem from a first person perspective, the discussion also showed how differently this indeterminacy appears when considered as a response to her husband, who remains related to her as a second person, a you, even after his death. Seen from this perspective, her difficulties do not primarily seem to lie in accepting the philosophical implications of the indeterminacy of psychological concepts. Her ethical and existential problems rather reveal her own difficulty of determining what meaning to see in her life with her husband. They arise, as it were, in response to her not being able to live in the certainty that she was loved.

I have characterized this as a form of existential despair, as a struggle to find meaning in her existence and to think of her life with him as good. I have suggested that it is insufficient to only think of this difficulty in ethical terms, if conceived as a difficulty of the will. If that were the case, it would be much more determined how to proceed. She could begin by just admitting the truth.

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