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## The Fact from Which the Silent Demand Arises

### 1 The Trust Which, in a Fundamental Sense, Is Integral to Human Existence

[17] It is integral to human life that we normally meet each other with natural trust. This happens not only when we meet a human being we know well, but it also holds when we meet a complete stranger. Only in special circumstances do we face a stranger with distrust in advance. The natural trust that human beings otherwise show towards one another in an immediate way must first have been stifled through the rise of informants, so that relationships have become strained. The country must be at war, or people who have no respect for law and order must have taken control. By contrast, in normal circumstances we trust the stranger's word and only begin to doubt when we have some special reason to do so. We never believe a human being is lying in advance, but only when we have caught them in a lie. If we are sitting in a train carriage chatting with someone who we are meeting for the first time in our life and who we know nothing about, we believe in advance what they say, and only begin to distrust their word if they make themselves guilty of exaggerations that are too grotesque. Nor do we expect someone to be a thief, if we meet them under normal circumstances: they must first behave suspiciously before we suspect them. In advance, we believe one another's word, in advance we trust one another. This may indeed seem strange, but it is integral to being human. It would be hostile to life to behave otherwise. We simply could not live; our life would wither away and become stunted, if we were in advance to meet each other in distrust, or assume that the other person is stealing and lying, dissembling and leading us on. [18]

But to show trust is to deliver oneself up.<sup>1</sup> Therefore we react fiercely when our trust is ‘abused’, as we say, even though not much may have been at stake. In real terms, the abuse of trust consists in trust being turned against the person who has shown it. That may be bad enough—but the worst thing about it may not be the embarrassment or danger that the abuse of one’s trust gives rise to, but rather the fact that the other person has not accepted it. For the other person to be able to abuse one’s trust, it must have left them cold. In reality, they did not want to accept it, however much they may seem to have done so outwardly—so that they can exploit it. And the question is whether it is not the coldness thus manifested towards us in the abuse of trust, much more than the possible embarrassment of the trusting person, which is the reason for the reaction.

However, it is not only when injustice is committed and trust is abused that we become aware of the fundamental sense in which trust and the delivering up of oneself that goes along with it is integral to our human life. We see it just as much in conflicts where no wrong is committed or suffered, but where two spirits and worlds collide.

The odd thing here is that if the collision is due to the fact that a purely personal expectation is not fulfilled by the other, moral accusations flare up, despite the fact that any moral assessment of the other’s behaviour is as a matter of fact beside the point. This does, of course, at the same time render the accusations unfair. Why does this happen? We require an explanation of why conflicts which in themselves have nothing to do with what is moral or immoral, or what is right or wrong, but only concern differences in our spirits and worlds, nonetheless become purely moral or self-righteous, and give rise to reproaches and accusations that are obviously unfair. [19]

An expectation which requires the other person to fulfil it personally is usually expressed in one way or another, perhaps through general attitude and behaviour, and perhaps even through words or actions. Whatever its form, whether spoken or silent, the expectation is expressed on the assumption that the other person will fulfil our expectation. This means that, in the expression of the expectation, one delivers oneself up to the other person’s fulfilment of it—even before it is established that there will be any such fulfilment. The expression is precisely what is required in order to bring about the fulfilment—perhaps simply in order to make the other aware of what one expects from them.

<sup>1</sup> This is Gogarten’s way of putting it in some of his enlightening remarks concerning the foundation of the law. Friedrich Gogarten, *Die Verkündigung Jesu Christi*, p. 108.

If the fulfilment is not attained, the expression is rendered vain and perhaps meaningless. But that is, in itself, not the worst of it. No, the worst thing is that one has laid oneself bare. One's expectation, which the expression of it has laid bare, has not been covered back over through the fulfilment of it by the other person. And it is this being laid bare which explains why the collision explodes into moral reproaches and accusations.

A person has dared to come forward in order that the other will come to meet them—and this hasn't happened. Despite the fact that no one has done anything wrong, this gives the conflict such an emotional character that one has to turn it into a conflict that arises from the fact that the other has committed a wrong. One must invent a wrong one has suffered in order to justify one's strong and entirely emotional reaction. In short, it is the emotional aspect of the situation that causes one to grasp at the moral reproaches and accusations which, precisely because of their moral character, are emotionally charged.

The always simple conflict within the conflict—namely that one has dared to come forward in order to be met but without this happening—in addition makes everything black or white, and makes one's judgement on the matter equally irrevocable. For it is precisely to the degree that things are black or white in our moral evaluations that our moral judgements become irrevocable.<sup>2</sup> [20]

But there is a third reason why the conflict flares up in specifically *moral* accusations. At all costs, it must not become apparent to the other person, and preferably not even to ourselves, that this is a matter of disappointed expectation. For above all, what we don't want to face up to is our being laid bare, even though this is what has happened. We would much rather admit blemishes and weaknesses, mistakes and stupidities, than face up to having laid ourselves bare. The collision within the collision must therefore be covered up. It is externalized, even though the reproaches may have to be rather far-fetched, and we may have to invent the most unfair accusations in order to conceal the actual conflict. Because they are moral, the accusations are beside the point, and as such they betray the fact that the conflict is really a conflict that must be hidden at all costs—even if the price for doing so is our having to invent absurd accusations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Our accusation is final and irrevocable in its original intention—even if our opponent may appeal against our moral accusation and seduce us into defending ourselves and engaging in discussion, and even though the discussion may cool us down and have a moderating effect on us, and cause us to revoke our moral accusation.

<sup>3</sup> This is where feeling insulted comes in. The person who has felt insulted advances reproaches and accusations that are unfair, but they do not want to acknowledge that they are unfair—though they know perfectly well that they are. In feeling insulted, they manage to hold themselves in a state of unclarity by sticking to the resentment as such. They allow themselves to be moved by the purely emotional inertia of the resentment—without wanting to become aware of their doing so. It is

If communication between human beings is short-circuited through a conflict, sparks of moral reproach and accusation begin to fly, because there is a delivering up of oneself in all forms of communication. For, when this delivering up of oneself is rejected, this leads to moral accusations, because the situation is emotional and uncomplicated, and because one's being laid bare must be covered up at all costs.

In E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End*, the path of the Bast couple cuts across that of the Schlegel sisters. Their respective milieus are as different from one another as they could possibly be. Leonard Bast is a penniless office clerk who lives in a dismal marriage, and whose whole life would be entirely drab were it not for his all-consuming craving for culture. However, he cannot control his relation to books and music; it is and becomes inauthentic. The Schlegel sisters, by contrast, have never known anything [21] in life other than economic security. They are almost wealthy, and since they have grown up in an appreciation of culture in all its facets, which is entirely natural to them, and have become the centre of a large social circle where these things are discussed, their existence is rich in experience and delightful variety.

On a chance occasion, they meet, and Leonard Bast receives an invitation to afternoon tea from the Schlegel sisters. It turns into a fiasco.

Leonard's expectations of what should have occurred in the afternoon with the Schlegel sisters are disappointed. He wants to talk about books, and for his meeting with the Schlegel sisters to take place in a more romantic compartment of his life, and at all costs to keep it from getting mixed up with his quotidian, grey, office existence.

The Schlegel sisters have quite different purposes in inviting him, however. The entirely tangible one is to get him out of the firm in which he is employed in time, because they have been informed that the firm is about to go bankrupt. And they have another, less tangible purpose: to help him in his pursuit of culture, because while his relation to books is inauthentic, they detect that behind it lies the will to pursue what is fundamental.

The ensuing conflict is inevitable. It cannot be averted. For the Schlegel sisters' idea in issuing the invitation is utterly opposed to Leonard's idea in accepting it.

The two parties are blind to each other's world. Leonard's expectation of an afternoon where he will be allowed to live completely in the cultural corner of his existence makes him blind to the Schlegel sisters' willingness to help. In his disappointment and bitterness, he gets carried away with outrageous and foolish accusations that they have low motives in inviting him, namely that they wanted to use him to spy on his firm. The Schlegel sisters, for their part, have no idea—until afterwards—about the two compartments in

characteristic of feeling insulted to want to hide the way in which its own emotional origin comes from being laid bare, and to divert one's own and the other's attention away from this by unreasonable accusations. This is, however, an opacity which knows that it is opaque, without thereby wanting to be rendered transparent, so that—self-pityingly—it cannot but cling to its own unreasonable accusations and reproaches.

Feeling insulted is the cheapest way of taking pleasure in pain, because the pain is imaginary and one knows that it is.

which Leonard Bast lives, and how important it is to him to keep them apart from one another. [22]

Leonard and the Schlegel sisters disagree about many things, but the disagreement that causes the collision does not have to do with concrete issues. Nor is it due to one of them committing wrong and the other suffering wrong. Rather, it is due to Leonard's expectations of the Schlegel sisters that they will satisfy his romantic cultural cravings by 'talking books' with him. But they do not do so—whereupon the lightning of morality inevitably strikes between them.

Those who are involved in it are never, or at least very seldom, aware that the conflict has nothing to do with right and wrong. Only outsiders who have a complete insight into the world of both parties—such as dramatists and novelists, theatregoers and readers—are in a position to see this.

That trust is a fundamental phenomenon is also shown in another way. In love and sympathy there is no impulse to give an account of the other person's character. We do not construct a picture of who he or she is. If we already have such an image, it only contains the features that inevitably catch the eye. Only those peculiarities are seen which stand out of themselves. We have not ourselves made a conscious effort, for the simple reason that nothing about the other has made us wary of them.

On the other hand, if we are not in sympathy with the other person, but there is some tension between us because there is something in the other that we are uncertain about or view with irritation, dissatisfaction, or antipathy, then we begin to construct a picture of the other's character. We see in him or her a complex set of dispositions, because we are wary of that person.

But in being together with the other person, the picture normally breaks down; their personal presence annihilates it. This is not to say that this could only happen through the other's words, works, and conduct, for if that were the case then it would only mean that our picture was contradicted, forcing us to either correct it or drop it altogether. No, this is to say something altogether different, in an absolute sense: the presence of the other leaves no space for my picture of them; their presence and my picture of them are incompatible. Each [23] excludes the other, and it is the picture that must give way. Only when the proof of the other person's unreliability has become a distrust that is literally ingrained, or where irritation and antipathy have closed us up completely in coldness towards the other person, does the picture continue to stand.

Why does the picture break down? It is difficult to say, because what happens is entirely fundamental, something prior to all morality and convention. An adequate description is impossible. It can only be suggested through paraphrase and metaphor, which enable us to approach the phenomenon from different angles.

Being together with the other person always means being under the 'spell' of their words and conduct. Psychology refers to this as 'the power of suggestion',

which can come in various degrees. The spell may be very weak, just enough to understand what the other person says and does; or it can be of such strength that we are, as we say, grasped, or captured, or swallowed up.

But it is more fundamental than this. Not to let the other come forward in words, works, and conduct, but to seek to hinder this with the picture we have formed of him or her through our suspicion and our antipathy, is a denial of life. It is at one and the same time a denial of both the other's and one's own life. It is integral to human existence not to want to reduce oneself to reactions, which—being merely 'sensible'<sup>1</sup>—are determined only by what has already happened. It is inherent to human existence that we are as new as the other's new words, new deeds, and new conduct. It is as if we assume that because these are in the present, they are new, and for this reason we want to renew our attitude to them. This could be called a trust in life itself, a trust in its ongoing renewal.

Afterwards, however, the words, works, and conduct turn out not to be new after all, and we vow that we will never again let ourselves be tricked or fooled or be naïve or however else we have let trust get the better of us.<sup>4</sup> [24]

In its fundamental sense, trust is integral to every conversation. In mere conversation, one delivers oneself up. This can be seen by the way in which, through the very act of addressing another person, a particular demand is made on them. This is not to say, that with respect to the demand, it is merely a demand for a response to what is said. Nor is it to say, with respect to the delivering up, that it depends only on the content and significance of what is said, or even its private nature. It is, however, to say that simply in addressing the other person as such—irrespective of the importance of the content of what we say—a certain tone is set through which, when we speak, we step out of ourselves, as it were, in order to exist in the speech's relationship to the other person. That is why the demand—though unspoken—has to do with the speaker being received by our picking up on the tone they set. Not to hear, or not to want to hear, the tone in what we say therefore means that we ourselves are overlooked, insofar as we have dared to put ourselves forward in this way.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that it is integral to human existence to try in every possible way to prevent ourselves being determined by what has already happened. To be determined by what one has heard, said, done, learnt, experienced, thought, etc. can mean two things. It can mean that it has taken shape within the person as an understanding of life, which gives their judgements perspective. And it may also mean that it has become a precautionary measure and, in particular, a countermeasure, whose purpose is to prevent the person from undertaking anything with an outcome that is uncertain. In this way, the word is old before it is spoken, and the action is old even before it is pursued.

That all speech takes place in such fundamental trust is also evident in the fact that the tone of even the most insignificant comment sounds false if we believe that it will not be taken up in the way it is intended.

The analysis that we have attempted so far—which might be said to have a phenomenological character—is also supported at a certain point by sciences such as psychology and psychiatry. Their investigations have clearly revealed how a child's life may be permanently affected by how adults behave towards them, so while the parents' ambitions for their children can be viewed as commendable in the distorting lens of bourgeois life, nonetheless humanly speaking it is a curse; for it means being brought up in a way that, for the whole of the child's life, may rob them of the most valuable thing of all, which is courage in life. This is due not least [25] to the fact that the child, unlike an adult, cannot display a merely reserved form of trust. In order to do so, one must have learnt to hold oneself in reserve. But the child has precisely not learnt how to reserve themselves in this conscious and self-controlled way. For them, their reservations are under the power of an automatic psychological process. As a result, the disappointed trust, and the uncertainty and insecurity that follow from it, therefore have such far-reaching and fateful consequences for the child.

But even though the relationship between the child and the adult is the place where an individual is delivered up to another in the most far-reaching and fateful sense—which is also why it is here that science has been able to observe it—it nonetheless holds, in various degrees, of all the relationships which we have to one another. An individual never has something to do with another human being without holding something of that person's life in their hands. It can be a very small matter, a passing mood, a dampening or quickening of spirit, a disgust one deepens or takes away. But it may also be of tremendous significance, so that it is simply up to the individual whether the other person's life flourishes or not.

Despite all this, we have a strange and subconscious idea that the world in which a human being has their life is not a world that the rest of us belong to in a genuine sense. We have a strange idea that the world which for each individual is the content of their life, is occupied by that individual self alone, so that we are outside the other's world and only touch it from time to time. If the normal encounter between human beings were just to consist in their respective worlds touching one another at the surface, and then continuing unaffected on their separate courses, then it all wouldn't have much significance. Only in the exceptional case, where a human being, by mistake or with some good or evil intention, were to accidentally break into another human being's world, would anything important be at stake.

In reality, however, this is indeed a very strange idea, the strangeness of which is not diminished by the fact that it seems so obvious to us. For, the relationship between us is in fact entirely otherwise: we *are* each other's world [26], and each other's fate. There are, however, many reasons why we usually ignore this fact.

It is commonly observed in philosophy that the most fundamental phenomena that belong to our existence are the ones we become aware of last, and with the greatest difficulty.

But in addition to this, the phenomenon we are speaking about here is highly disturbing. For the sake of our peace of mind, it is fortunate that we have no idea of the extent to which we have had other human beings' courage in life or disgust in life, their frankness or deceitfulness, in our hands by what we were and said and did to them in our relationship with them, but that all this is hidden.

To describe the nature of trust, different expressions have been used in the foregoing: the individual delivers themselves up, goes out of themselves, places something of their life in the hands of the other person. These expressions are metaphorical, and can be misunderstood.

In order to avoid one significant misunderstanding, but which can be encouraged by the metaphors, none of this means that trust should consist in turning oneself inside out. Trust has nothing to do with abandoning all spiritual modesty.

It is one thing to deliver oneself up and lay oneself bare in the sense of turning oneself inside out in the presence of the other person. For this there is really no need for trust, and in fact it is probably rarely present. In general, nothing is really required of the other person, except that they act as a spectator.

It is quite another thing, however, to deliver oneself up in the kind of trust one person shows the other through which something is always required of them, insofar as this does involve an expectation of them. In the expectation of the other, one undertakes something, and this is what the delivering up of oneself consists in. But what one does, and what form this delivering up of oneself takes, does not necessarily mean that one confides in the other person—although of course, it could take this form—but it can take all sorts of other forms too. For example, the delivering up of oneself which consists in trusting the other person to be truthful, or in adopting a particular tone in speaking with them. Similarly, it means that being laid bare through the trust that was not accepted, consists in [27] daring to come forward only to be rejected—and it has nothing to do with laying oneself bare in any exhibitionist sense.

## 2 The Demand Which Arises out of the Trust, Which in a Fundamental and Wide-Ranging Sense, Is Integral to Our Human Life

As surely as a human being with the trust that they either show or desire places more or less of their life into the other's hands, so surely is the demand to take care of this person's life integral to our existence such as it simply happens to be. How much or how little is at stake for a human being in the trust that they show obviously varies greatly. It depends on many different factors: on the individual's psychological state of mind and condition in that very instant, and upon the situation, which is determined not least of all by who or how the other person is. But in any event, it means that in any meeting between human beings there is an unspoken demand, irrespective of the circumstances in which the meeting takes place and the nature of the meeting.

Regardless of how varied the communication between us may be, it always consists in daring to come forward to be met by the other. This is at the root of it, and is the basic phenomenon of ethical life. Therefore, the demand that arises from this needs no revelation in the theological sense for it to be heard, and nor does it come from a more or less conscious arrangement which we have supposedly agreed to set up for our mutual benefit.

If trust and the delivering up of oneself that goes with it were just down to our discretion, so that without any loss to ourselves we could choose not to bother with them, then in our lives there would be no other demands than those which one human being might decide for themselves to place on the other, whether they be conventional, sentimental, or megalomaniacal. However, this is not the case. Trust is not down to us. It is given. Our life is simply created over our heads, such that it cannot [28] be lived in any other way than that one human being, through trust that is either shown or desired, delivers themselves up to the other human being and thereby puts more or less of their life in the other's hands.<sup>5</sup>

By our mere attitude to one another, we take part in giving shape to each other's world. Through my attitude to the other person, I play a part in determining the breadth and colour that the other person's world has for them. I play a part in making it broad or narrow, light or dark, varied or dull—and not least I play a part in making it threatening or secure. This comes about not through theories

<sup>5</sup> Distrust is not, therefore—as a mode of being—equal to trust. Trust is fundamental—and distrust arises due to lack of trust. Therefore trust requires no further foundation or justification, as distrust does. To use a modern philosophical expression, distrust is the 'deficient mode' of trust.<sup>ii</sup>

and views, but through my mere attitude. This is why there is an unspoken, and one might say anonymous, demand on us that we take care of the life that trust puts in our hands.<sup>6</sup>

### 3 The Two-Fold Function of the Conventional Forms

Usually we trust one another in a very guarded way. We hold ourselves in reserve and do not let ourselves go in trust. Not even a situation heightened by suffering and helplessness necessarily leads to unreserved trust. Correspondingly, in everyday life what is required of us is not to take care of the life of the other, but just the kind of consideration and courtesy required by custom. A reduction takes place, both of the trust shown, and of the demand to take care of the other person's life. This is the purpose of convention. [29]

However, the conventional forms have a twofold function. No matter how they may have arisen, they ease our social interaction with one another, making it smooth and effortless, especially by saving us from laying our souls bare. Without the protection of conventional norms, any social intercourse with other people would become unbearable.

But does something like what we call 'spiritual reticence' mean that there are things that are not to be called by their name? Should we pretend that they do not exist, by keeping silent about them? Are there emotions which can only exist as long as we refrain from expressing them, but which die when, by expressing them, we let them come to the surface of the soul? Does what is most vital wither in the light of day? Can it not tolerate this exposure?

No, what is meant is rather something else: there are certain things which cannot tolerate formlessness! What is most vital for a human being does not tolerate banality. Formless expression destroys it. Lack of spiritual reticence is anything but harmless.

Spiritual reticence keeps the most vital human relationships from being spoiled by banality. It gives form to the life of a human being. What is most vital requires a controlled, bounded, and indirect expression.

<sup>6</sup> It will probably be objected that the fact that an individual puts their life in another's hands by trusting them is one thing, but that the demand to take care of that life is quite another thing, as there must be a difference between a fact and a demand—between a judgement about what is, and a judgement about what ought to be. This objection raises a number of questions, and to deal with them would greatly increase the size of this book. They must be set aside for treatment elsewhere.

All that concerns us here is to point out that there is an intimate connection between the fact and the demand, and to point out that the demand arises out of the fact in a highly immediate way. Indeed, the fact forces us into the option of either taking care of the other person's life, or ruining it. Given the way life is created, there is no third option. To accept the fact, but without being willing to hear the demand, therefore implies being indifferent to the question of whether life is to be promoted or ruined.

The will to form is not something first found among the elect, among creative artists. It is already fundamentally [30] human, it belongs to the life of any human being, even though the human being apart from this may have very little relation to what we otherwise understand by art. And because we ourselves cannot create the necessary forms, we therefore adopt the conventional ones.

Our life is given to us, we have not created it ourselves, and therefore it cannot be given a direct expression. If we nevertheless attempt to do so, we falsify it in pathetically or sentimentally unbounded effusion.

In the second place, however, we use the very same conventional forms to reduce trust and its demand. Instead of allowing convention to serve our life's need for form, we instead use it to keep at a distance from one another and to encase ourselves. The person who trusts has already through convention reserved their trust, and so guarded themselves; and the one who is trusted thereby escapes hearing the demand contained in that trust, to take care of the trusting person's life.

For the fact is that if a person's trust is met by any other response than acceptance, it turns into distrust. This does not require hostility: it happens already, and maybe to the same degree, as a result of indifference, reservation, and rejection. We do not want to risk it, and therefore we neutralize our trust in advance. The alternative constituted by human life in itself, namely that any response which does not involve care for the trusting person's life instead ruins it, is broken open by a third possibility—which is the neutral possibility of social convention. We cannot bear the two alternatives, of care or of ruin, which belong to given life itself, and so to avoid these alternatives we have tacitly agreed to adopt convention as a form of existence instead.

Children, however, do not go along with this. The child can only trust without holding back. When the child shows trust, they therefore abandon themselves to others completely. As a result of being outside convention, the child is at the mercy of the two alternatives above. If they do not encounter love, their future possibilities in life are destroyed—something which science has revealed, as has already been mentioned. [31]

#### 4 The Demand Is Unspoken. It Is Not Spoken by the Other Human Being

However, the demand which is contained in any relationship with another human being is unspoken, and is not to be equated with their spoken wish or request. It is not articulated in the expectations on me which the other person says or indicates. If they coincide, this is purely accidental, and often they do not.

The other human being's own interpretation of what the trust they show or desire is really about is one thing; the demand which is implicit in that trust as a 'fact of creation', so to speak, is quite another thing, and that is something that it is up to me to interpret. And the two interpretations may very well conflict with one another. The situation may be one in which I am challenged to oppose the very thing that the other human being expects and wishes me to do, because this alone serves them best. The challenge, therefore, presupposes that I know better than the other person what is best for them.

If this were not the case, a communication between us—on a basic and existential level—of the kind where one person has to do with another person would not be possible. For if it were merely a matter of responding to the expectation of the other and fulfilling their wish, our life together would simply consist in—irresponsibly—making ourselves into the tool of the other person. There would no longer be any challenge in our mutual relationships, but these relationships would just consist in pandering to one another. But what we are speaking of is a demand for love, not for indulgence. Conflict is therefore always possible and this means that everything is at risk.

This is no mere theory. What in ordinary parlance is called 'being nice' consists in just going along with the other, abstaining from any contradiction which would annoy them, refraining from any criticism that would insult, avoiding the confrontation that would not be well received. In order to shy away from this contradiction, the conversation is led on to what the other person is right about, so that one [32] can refrain from criticism and instead find a way to praise them, to at all costs avoid confrontation in order to settle down cosily in mutual agreement on something irrelevant. What people commonly call 'being nice' is usually the kind of accommodation that results in an insincere relationship. What is commonly called love is usually a mawkishness which shies away from the truth between people like the plague. And the situation is not altered by the fact that it could involve a sacrifice that is both insisted upon and made. For, without the will to truth, even sacrifice turns to flattery. In short, if there were no difference between the challenge implicit in every relationship and the other person's spoken request, our life together would consist in abandoning oneself to the crowd; for a crowd can consist in just one human being, if my relation to that person is just to go along with them, however much this may call on me to make a great sacrifice and be construed as niceness.

The demand which is implicit in any meeting between human beings never becomes vocal but is and remains silent. The individual to whom it is addressed must decide for themselves from relationship to relationship what it consists in.

This does not mean that the individual themselves can arbitrarily, whimsically, and at their own discretion give it whatever content they like. In that case, there would be no demand at all. But it is there, and since it is given with the very fact that the individual belongs to the world in which the other person has their life, and therefore has something of the other human being's life in their hands, it is a demand to take care of them. But as regards how this is to happen, nothing is said. Even though it concerns the other human being, they themselves are not in a position to say anything about this; for, as was mentioned before, it may well involve something completely opposed to their wishes. It is integral to the demand that the individual on whom the demand falls, with whatever they might have left in terms of insight, imagination, and understanding, must work out for themselves what the demand involves. [33]

## 5 Does the Demand Encourage Encroachment?

Will the demand not encourage intrusion and encroachment? In particular, one might ask: how does the individual come to know what best serves the other person, especially when what supposedly is best for them disappoints them or fills them with resentment? The answer, to put it briefly, is that the individual comes to know this from their own understanding of life. But of what concern is that to the other person, who perhaps does not even share it? Why should they have an understanding of life imputed to them or perhaps even forced on them, which is entirely alien to them and which they can neither adopt or appreciate?

A prominent idea in the idealistic ethics of the nineteenth century, largely through the influence of Kant, was respect for the independence and autonomy of the other human being. This ethics has been torn to pieces today by both philosophers and theologians;<sup>iii</sup> and this critique is justified, as mutual respect for one another's autonomy and independence threatened to be all there is to ethics. The ethical came to consist in self-formation, and respect for the other in their self-formation. Respect for the other person's independence was used to legitimate one's own self-formation, and in the end this inevitably led to a cult of personality. This view was based on the idea that every human being is a world unto themselves, and that other people stand outside it. Consequently, there was no consideration of the conflict within which the idea of respect for the other human being's independence and autonomy arises and belongs. This conflict arises as the question: of what concern is my understanding of life to the other person, when because of it, I fancy that I know better than the other person what is best for them?

Now, an understanding of life can be many different things, it is a very abstract expression. It can concern something quite fundamental. To disappoint a person's desire for flattery and pandering [34] could hardly be viewed as an attempt to impose on them a foreign understanding of life—except perhaps by the disappointed person themselves. There is a certain conception of what human existence is, which one can assume is unavoidable.

However, an understanding of life can take on more and more definite features, and a firm structure, so that in this way it becomes more and more narrow. It can become hardened into an ideology, so that for the individual it becomes something simply absolute. The more this happens, the more the individual will view their relationship to other human beings as an occasion for intrusion and possibly encroachment. The view of life that has stiffened into an ideology becomes, for the individual, what gives their life meaning, now in the sense of inverting their order of rank: their life exists for the sake of their view of life, rather than the other way round. It is not so much a case of their own life giving content to the view of life as the reverse: it is the view of life that gives content to life—a life that without that view is empty! The life-view becomes the thing for which they exist. Consequently, they take it that what is valid for their own existence must also as a result be valid for everyone else's as well. The ultimate truth which they have got hold of must also be the ultimate truth for the other person—otherwise it would not be ultimate. In the name of this ultimate truth, they therefore know—with undeniable certainty—what best serves the other. Consequently, they do not need to concern themselves with the idea of respect for the independence or autonomy of other human beings. Moreover, the further this process goes on, the easier it becomes to encroach on the other person with good conscience: after all, it is the ultimate truth, it is the absolute view of life, to which one is responsible.

Just as it is possible to lose all appreciation of the problem under discussion, through an attitude of pandering, in the mutual admiration or indifference towards each other, hidden under the guise of respect for the other's life in their own world; so it can also be lost in a similar way when the view of life becomes so rigid and so religiously final that we thereby think we know what serves the other best, and that it is only [35] through our view of life that not only our own life is given meaning and content, but also the life of the other human being.

We are thus dealing with two degenerate forms of communication between human beings. The first is the kind of intercourse which consists in just smoothly slipping past one another, and always taking evasive action, out of laziness, fear of others—and the proclivity to keep things cosy! For there are few things that make us more comfortable than mutual praise, except perhaps making common cause

against a third party. But in any case, mutual admiration rarely fails as a way to generate cosiness. The kind of understanding that is involved here is not the kind which in the interests of honesty is willing to stand up to the other, but only the kind of understanding that one knows beforehand they will welcome. The other covets this understanding, almost as a tribute which is their due.

The attraction of this kind of association is that it does not entail any significant inconvenience. It calls for very little. When the other person is satisfied by being given all the understanding that they want, and even a bit more, then they don't bother us any further. When each person gets their due through the kind of praise and understanding they covet, then we can enjoy the peace of indifference towards one another. In reality, no communication takes place, while at the same time it appears that people are completely engulfed in social intercourse.

It is, by the way, a common conception that it is only among people who are relative strangers to one another, that social intercourse takes a form in which one says what the other wants to hear, while, supposedly, sincerity increases in line with greater degrees of acquaintance. However, the opposite may equally well be true: that is, the more people are united in friendship, the less sincere their relationship becomes, while they are more likely to be sincere in relationships with those who they do not know so well.

The opposite form of degenerate communication between people consists in wanting to mould the other person. We have definite opinions about how things are to be organized, and how the other person should be. It is tempting to call them opinions without understanding, [36] because the more definitive they are, the more necessary it becomes that we are not distracted by acquiring too much understanding of those whom we want to mould. This kind of understanding has to wait. The mania for perfection turns everything which is said and done into something provisional and preparatory. The understanding must be postponed until perfection has been obtained.

Thus, considering these two degenerate forms of communication, we are caught in a conflict between a consideration for others that is in fact indulgence, compliance, and flattery on the one hand, and on the other hand lack of consideration for others which in the interests of our own understanding of life becomes an intrusion and an encroachment. But although this conflict can be resolved on a case-by-case basis only by the exercise of individual judgement, certain basic principles can also give us guidance in making such judgements.

The fact from which we have started has been characterized using the metaphors of 'having something of a human being's life in one's hands', and 'that something of the other human being's life is delivered up to us'. Precisely what it is of the

other's life that is in our hands and which is delivered up to us can vary considerably. It can range from their most passing mood to their entire fate.

However, what has not been delivered up to us in an immediate way is the other person's individuality, which determines their reactions to what we say or do. That we are one another's world does not mean that one human being has the other human being's *will* in their hands. The other's individuality and will, their personality, cannot be intruded on in the same way as their moods, or even their fate.

The other human being's more or less passing mood is something that we often have in our hands in the most immediate way. However, we do not have in our hands in the same immediate way how they overcome or succumb to the despondency which we have caused by our misconduct, for example. Likewise, the fate of the other human being is often something that the individual has in their power in an unmediated way. For example, it can be down to a human being whether their spouse's life flourishes or not: [37] one kind of inconsiderateness or another can make marriage into a form of lifelong suffering for the spouse. But that does not mean that the inconsiderate partner, in the same unmediated way, has in their hands how the spouse reacts to their inconsiderateness, defends themselves against it, or fails to respond. The other person's individuality and will, which determine whether he or she resigns themselves or does not resign themselves to their fate, is not delivered up to the inconsiderate partner in the same way as that fate itself.

Nevertheless, the boundary here is fluid: the individuality and will of children in particular, but also adults, can be assaulted through assaults on their moods and fate.

This much can therefore be said: whatever the individual may say or do out of their own insight into what best serves the other, they have no right to try to make themselves master over how the other then responds. No attempt should be made to decide what the other person *does* with one's words and actions. To this there is no right, no matter how good our intentions. The will to know clearly how best to help the other, and to speak, be silent, or act on this knowledge, must be linked with the will to let the other person be master in their own world. The demand to take care of that particular part of the other person's life which has been delivered up to us, whatever the words and actions that it may bring about, is always at the same time a demand to give the other person ample time and opportunity to make their world as expansive as possible. The demand is always at the same time a demand that we use this deliverance, out of which it arises, to release the other from their imprisonment and enable their vision to look around at the far horizon.

On the other hand, the person who wants to mould other human beings as a result of being possessed with a furious will for perfection will stop at nothing, not even at the violation of the other's individuality and will. This person exploits the fact that the boundary is fluid, to try to become master of the other person's reactions, pestering them constantly to [38] try to suck the other's individuality out of them. The other person is to be changed completely from the ground up, that is, at the level of their will.

Nothing, however, gives someone the right to make themselves the master of another human being's individuality or will: neither good intentions, nor one's own insight into what best serves the other, nor the greatness of the calamities that they would otherwise be able to fend off from the person concerned.<sup>7</sup>

'To have something in one's hands' is a metaphor. In ordinary speech we use it to indicate the relatively rare situation when things hang in the balance. The situation is one of suspense, the scales could tip in either direction, leading to one outcome or another.

Whatever happens, the whole weight of the situation is focused on the individual. It is up to them which way the situation goes and is determined in the end. And for this reason, whatever transpires, what happens or does not happen, will come back to them as a consequence of what they do or fail to do. [39]

Using the metaphor, as we have done here, of 'having the other human being's life in one's hands' is to use a phrase of some emotional power. The emotional significance of the metaphor stems from the contrast that lies in the relationship to which it refers: that what the individual has the power to turn around is something in the other human being's life, whether it is merely their mood or, in extreme cases, their entire fate. It is entirely fair that we have power over things

<sup>7</sup> Bertha in Henrik Pontoppidan's *De Dødes Rige* [The Realm of the Dead] is not in the least doubt about what would make her daughter, Jytte Abildgaard, happy, and that is a life together with Torben Diehmer. But Jytte's lifeblood has been drained from her by an unconquerable distrust of life. She dares not come to grips with life. For just one day, her love for Torben Diehmer overcomes it; but she no sooner says yes to him than the unconquerable distrust asserts itself again, causing her love to wither, and the next morning to retract what she had said. At this point, Bertha's anger flares up. She is angered by this light-hearted trifling with life and death, and she is struck by the wild idea that it might be her duty to force Jytte. But this idea no sooner occurs to her, than she gives it up. Nothing gives anyone the right to take another human being's will in their hands, not even if doing so would save that human being from the greatest calamity. Pontoppidan writes the following: 'It was only a momentary flash of anger for her. She knew only too well that she would never dare to wrest her child's fate out of the hands of life's hidden powers, in order to control it in accordance with her own will. She found herself here at the boundary of her courage and acknowledged her impotence. Though she was certain about the path that Jytte would have to follow to attain peace and happiness, she dared not take that responsibility upon herself' (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1918, vol. 1, p. 111).<sup>iv</sup>

and animals, and it is fair that the legal authorities should have delegated legal powers over others as defined by law in order to protect third parties against their assaults. But it is entirely unfair that one human being, in a completely immediate way, has power over another human being, as this is neither delegated power, nor defined by valid laws, nor serves to protect third parties. The contrast mentioned above consists in the fact that every human being is an independent and responsible individual—and at the same time that we are inevitably and to a great extent pointed towards one another, so that our relationships to one another are in the most immediate way relations of power, whether what is held in our power is the other person's mood or their fate.

From this fundamental dependence and immediate power, the demand arises that we take care of that in the other person's life which is dependent upon us, and which we have in our power. However, based on the same demand, it is forbidden that we ever attempt to rob the other person of their independence, even for their own sake. Responsibility for the other person can never consist in our taking on the responsibility which is their own.