

Non-Machiavellian Manipulation and the Opacity of Motive

Kate Manne

WHEN WE THINK about manipulation, and what it is to be manipulative, it's natural to focus initially on some pretty unsympathetic characters. One of Robert Noggle's leading examples is Iago, who is essentially pure evil.¹ Sarah Buss begins with the effete seducer, Johannes, of Kierkegaard's invention.² Marcia Baron starts with Ayn Rand; Anne Barnhill with Dick Cheney.³ Moti Gorin had the example of a used car salesman.⁴ And I myself was initially drawn to thinking about Isabelle of *Dangerous Liaisons*, and the cutesy—but to my mind, creepy—Amelie of *Amelie*, who is a well-meaning but ultimately misguided meddler in the arc of people's lives.⁵ These characters are all out of the ordinary in more ways than one,

1. Robert Noggle, "Manipulative Actions: A Conceptual and Moral Analysis," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1996): 43.

2. Sarah Buss, "Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons: Manipulation, Seduction, and the Basis of Moral Constraints," *Ethics* 13, no. 3 (January 2005): 201–10.

3. Marcia Baron, "Manipulativeness," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 77, no. 2 (November 2003): 37; Anne Barnhill, "What Is Manipulation?" this volume.

4. In the workshop version of his paper for this volume, the example was subsequently dropped, I believe.

5. In my original draft paper for this volume, entitled "Leaving Well Enough Alone," (ms) which I subsequently came to largely disagree with and ultimately discard. Thanks to Christian Coons and Michael Weber for allowing me to do this, and for encouraging me to write this paper by way of an alternative contribution—and for patiently waiting on the results. Thanks also to audiences at the BGSU Applied Ethics and Public Policy Workshop in March 2012, and to Marcia Baron for subsequent fruitful correspondence. Baron's contribution to this volume was also a big part of what prompted me to explore the relationship between manipulation and intention here, as will become clear later on.

of course. But part of it is that manipulating others is either a way of life for them, or at least seems to be something they have disturbingly few scruples about.

However, as each of the above authors either explicitly acknowledges, or at least seems to suggest via their choice of other examples, manipulation is very much an everyday occurrence too. And most people's manipulative tendencies are fortunately more local. Noggle talks about someone's sulking in order to get his own way about having Chinese food yet again.⁶ Buss discusses the manipulative nature of many ordinary seduction techniques.⁷ Baron talks about manipulating your children into behaving decently in a restaurant or on an airplane.⁸ Barnhill has the example of baking cookies in order to make your house smell enticing to potential buyers.⁹ And Gorin has the example of complimenting your boss on some genuine accomplishment of hers, in order to try to improve your standing in her eyes.¹⁰ Some of these behaviors may not be ideal, perhaps, but they are morally small fry. And they are hardly out of the ordinary.

I suspect that manipulation is also pretty common in the context of many close—and seemingly otherwise good—relationships. Members of the same family often behave quite manipulatively towards each other, for example, even if they have little tendency to be manipulative in general. And most of us should cop to the fact that we ourselves can be a bit manipulative from time to time, at least towards particular others with whom we have a complex history. Nor is manipulation always a one-way street, in terms of social power. There can be manipulative dynamics, where both parties to the relationship try to manipulate the other, or one person effectively invites the other to pull their strings, so to speak. It can be convenient to be able to rely on someone else to finagle you into doing what

6. Noggle, "Manipulative Actions," 46–47. Noggle also explicitly observes in opening that "a large portion of the wrongs that people commonly do to one another—especially to friends and loved ones—are forms of manipulation. Even ordinarily moral people who seldom violate rights to life, liberty, or property—people who would not assault, abduct, or steal from one another—often engage in manipulation," 43.

7. Buss, "Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons," 220–21.

8. Baron, "Manipulativeness," 45. Moreover, in her contribution to this volume, Baron explicitly proposes to focus primarily on cases of manipulative behavior which are not the morally most egregious—i.e., where there is room for debate about its moral status; see her essay, "The *Mens Rea* and Moral Status of Manipulation," this volume.

9. Barnhill, "What is Manipulation?," this volume.

10. Moti Gorin, "Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation," this volume.

you really, in your heart of hearts, wanted to do all along. Manipulation of this kind may still be untoward, but it's not at bottom unwelcome. Indeed, quite the contrary.¹¹

We might wonder whether common or garden manipulation of these various different kinds can be understood as merely being much milder variants of the sort of behavior that Iago exhibits, when he deceives Othello into thinking that Desdemona is being unfaithful to him, which subsequently drives Othello mad. I suspect and am going to argue that there are important differences, which should subsequently make us cautious about the risk of over-generalizing from more extreme cases, with all their moral co-morbidities. In particular, I am not convinced that ordinary manipulative behavior is always conscious or intentional, even in a weak sense of what such a conscious manipulative intention might be held to be. For, I think that people's motives in behaving manipulatively are often quite opaque to them. This suggestion runs counter to certain going accounts of manipulation, such as Noggle's, as we'll see. And it would also have tricky—and interesting—moral implications, which I'll go on to explore as well.

But as well as the main intended upshot of this essay, I also have an ulterior—although not opaque—motive. For, I am generally inclined to think that many ordinary moral failings and foibles can be traced to divisions and opacities within the self. For example, we often tell ourselves not to do something, or at least that we ought not do it. But we keep doing it anyway, not so much because of weakness of will but, rather, because our will was never mobilized in the first place. That is, the original moral judgment was not insincere so much as hollow, in being disassociated from our sense of self, or at least our sense of agency. This is one common form of moral self-division.¹² And we may also sincerely avow one thing,

11. This goes against my own suggestions in "Leaving Well Enough Alone." (ms) In particular, I subsequently came to think that the relationship between successful manipulation and overriding the manipulated party's will is significantly more complicated than I had been allowing. Cf. Allen Wood, who emphasizes the subversion of the manipulated party's freedom in his contribution to this volume, "Coercion, Manipulation, Exploitation."

12. Elsewhere, I say more about the phenomenon of moral dissociation, and connect it with P. F. Strawson's idea that one can adopt the objective attitude towards oneself as well as others. I suggest that such possibilities make it plausible to temper motivational or judgment internalism, but that it need not be abandoned; see my "Tempered Internalism and the Participatory Stance," in *Motivational Internalism*, edited by Gunnar Björnsson, Caj Strandberg, Ragnar Francén Olinder, John Eriksson, and Fredrik Björklund (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

but find ourselves thinking another—or keep seeing the world in a way incompatible with our avowal.¹³ Either of which discrepancies we may be unable to admit to, or even so much as recognize, at least without some prodding. Similarly, I think we sometimes tell ourselves that we’re doing one thing, or acting in a certain spirit, when in reality what we’re doing or feeling is nothing of the sort. This last possibility is what this essay will in large part be about. That is, I’ll be interested in the ways in which our own motives in acting can be opaque or unclear to us. Or so it strikes me as natural to describe the cases that follow.

But a word of terminological caution is in order before we continue. The notion of an opaque motive is meant to be suggestive here, but it is ultimately merely stipulative. It will function throughout as a kind of neutral placeholder for whatever mental-cum-explanatory states do the relevant theoretical work in the examples adduced below.¹⁴ Questions about whether or not these sorts of behavioral dispositions could really be *intentions*—of an unconscious or subconscious kind, say—or whether they should be understood as a distinct kind of motive will of course be controversial.¹⁵ As will questions about the nature and ubiquity of *unconscious* motivations. And these are not controversies which I would be able to do justice to in the present context. So I will concentrate in what follows on the examples themselves and on some of their moral contours. I will not be taking a stand on how the psychological phenomena therein should ultimately be theorized—which, as I see it, would depend on a whole host

13. I think that cases of implicit bias are plausibly often like this.

14. I borrow this useful general strategy from Mark Schroeder; see his *Slaves of the Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9. Not that my choice of terminology is risk-free, admittedly. In particular, some Kantians would naturally want to reserve a more specialized job description for the notion of a motive. Thanks to Marcia Baron for useful discussion of the possible distinctions one might draw here between motives, goals, and intentions (and also see below).

15. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe’s distinction between intentions and motives, the latter of which is held to be a broader category than the former. Although I’m not attempting to follow her usage here, she does hold that declarations about one’s own motives in acting may be sincere but false. And motives are said to “interpret” a person’s actions (§12). Whereas Anscombe claimed, notoriously, that acting intentionally involves a kind of spontaneous knowledge or awareness of what one is doing. In particular, she claims that denying one’s awareness of what one is doing, or declaring merely observational knowledge thereof, is to “refuse application” to the sort of ‘Why-question’ whose applicability is a mark of genuinely intentional actions. She goes on to discuss the “curious intermediary” answer to this question, “I don’t know why I did it” or “I found myself doing it,” which culminates in the suggestion that these actions may be *voluntary* without being intentional (§16). G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

of delicate issues within both moral psychology and the philosophy of action.¹⁶

Let me make a start, then, by telling you a story. Joan is a woman in her late sixties, who now lives alone. Her partner of many decades died a few years ago, and they never had any children. She has a few friends who live locally, but she is generally pretty isolated. So Joan is, as one might expect, rather lonely. Although, being a proud person, she'd be loath to ever admit it.

But Joan does find herself wondering, increasingly resentfully, why her younger brother and his two teenage children don't come to visit her more often. They live only one state over, a mere four-hour drive away. And they don't even call. Not that it really matters, Joan would be quick to add—she is perfectly all right on her own. It is just that she is a little shocked that her only remaining relatives have barely paid her the time of day, ever since the funeral. Which they left early, she could not help but notice. Or so she might remark in conversation, or think darkly to herself.

Still, Joan is determined to keep up what she might describe as *her* side of the bargain, when it comes to preserving good family relations. In particular, she has come to make a point of sending each of her relatives an expensive and carefully chosen birthday gift, whenever their birthday rolls around. Although she can little afford to make such extravagant purchases, given her modest pension, she keeps doing so regardless. She tells herself that she is being thoughtful and generous, and showing the proper family spirit—*somebody* has to make an effort to keep up the connection. Or again, so she might say, if only to herself.

I doubt that it will come as a surprise when I tell you that, at this point, Joan's gifts are effectively functioning as a rebuke to the relatives she feels hurt and wronged by. Her gifts are effectively *designed*—to use another suggestive expression—to make them all feel guilty for not paying her more attention. Her gifts have become pointed. And Joan is depicting herself here as the morally injured party, who is neglected and misunderstood, as

16. For two particularly insightful discussions of unconscious motives and their relation to reasons for action, see Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and J. David Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

well as virtuous and long-suffering. She is playing the part, in other words, of a self-appointed martyr.

But nor will it come as a surprise, I'd hazard, if I told you that these truths are the furthest thing from Joan's mind in acting as she does. It would simply never occur to her that she is trying to lay a guilt trip on her relatives—and she might have a hard time so much as admitting that she is inwardly resentful.¹⁷ We can even imagine her stumbling across and reading an article about passive aggressive gift-giving. She shakes her head over this behavior, evincing disapproval, without thinking to connect it to what she has been doing. Or maybe she goes through the mental motions of examining her own conscience, but quickly dismisses the possibility that she does anything at all like this. And if the charge was made to her by her relatives, or even a neutral third party, she would be incredibly defensive and genuinely surprised. She is just making an effort to be a good sister and aunt, she'd protest. What else can she do, since her relatives are evidently far too busy to visit her more regularly? And she is no longer capable of driving so far to see them. Or so she might declare, and genuinely believe (whether or not this is true independently of what may now have effectively become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy).

I hope that the story I've just told will seem psychologically plausible, perhaps even familiar, to you. Passive-aggressive gift-giving is a common enough tendency. And, just to be clear, I don't mean to be moralizing here. For one thing, I think that most of us have probably caught ourselves doing things of this general nature from time to time as well. And I also feel a fair amount of sympathy for Joan, although it of course doesn't follow that what she's doing is unobjectionable. How to think about her behavior morally remains less than clear to me, as I'll eventually explain. But first, we should ask: what exactly is she doing?

17. I am aware of how gendered this example might seem. But altering the gender of the key character here—as I was initially inclined to do—doesn't feel natural to me. These sorts of scripts *are* often gendered. (A similar script for men might be learned helplessness, where certain basic household chores are simply not done, or else are done so poorly, that others, usually women, end up taking over.) And if women are traditionally relied upon to buy the birthday gifts in a family, then it is not all that surprising that this would become a natural social outlet for aggression. Other forms of passive aggressive gift-giving include buying the recipient slightly the wrong thing—or completely the wrong thing—in addition to leaving the price tag on (especially if the item was clearly rescued from the discount bin). Some people also describe in great detail the much better present that they very nearly got you, but for some reason didn't. And there is also the trick of giving a nice gift to some people, and a mean or peculiar gift to others, on the same occasion. Which is awkward for everyone.

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In particular, we should ask: Are Joan's actions manipulative? I take it to be very natural to describe them in this way.¹⁸ We can readily imagine Joan's relatives reaching for this word when they try to characterize their unease or even anger with her behavior. And if there was a debate between her brother and his children (say) about whether or not the charge is fair, my own intuitions would tend to side with the prosecution, given the case as described so far.

But there is a potential ambiguity about what it means to behave manipulatively which is worth bringing out here. It might mean *being* manipulative as a person, insofar as you act in this way—even if you are not a manipulative person generally. But the thought is that the more you do this sort of thing, or at least are inclined to do it, the more manipulative of a person you are or become. On the other hand, behaving manipulatively might mean merely that your *action* is manipulative, whether or not you are *being* manipulative in acting in this way. For, it is natural to say that some actions are designed to achieve such-and-such, even if this isn't the agent's design or intention in so acting. That is, it seems to me that an action can sometimes be truly described as having a certain purpose, or having a certain success condition, even if we would at least hesitate to ascribe such a purpose or intention to the agent in performing it. These actions might be said to have something of a life of their own, then.¹⁹

One reason this might happen is sheer force of habit. Suppose that I have been trying for a long time to get you to like me. But I've gradually become discouraged and less enamored with this idea—or simply with you. I thus no longer intend to try to win you over. But my actions have not quite kept pace with my recent change of heart. So I keep behaving in a friendly (or even slightly obsequious) manner, more or less out of habit, even though I no longer really want to get you to like me or to make a

18. Or, alternatively, to describe them as *attempts* to be manipulative, if one is taking 'X behaved manipulatively towards Y' to imply success in this endeavor—as I myself am not here.

19. See Velleman for a similar distinction, which undergirds the claim that "it was my resentment speaking, not I," after I have gone off at a friend when I wasn't consciously intending to. But he argues that I can still be held responsible for my outburst, insofar as I am responsible for keeping myself under control; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, 126–27. Cf. Arpaly, who discusses and disputes the adequacy of this general suggestion; Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 6–7.

friend of you. My actions thus seem designed to achieve a certain outcome which I the agent no longer want. They are merely the behavioral residue of a now defunct intention.

But, even if such a distinction can be made out satisfactorily, it's not obvious that Joan's behavior should be understood along these lines. We can imagine Joan's relatives being quite angry with her, and their anger seeming justified (depending on how the story was filled in in more detail—of which more later). In which case, we might be hesitant to commit ourselves to saying that it is merely Joan's *actions* that are manipulative rather than that *Joan* is behaving manipulatively in acting as she does. And this is despite the fact that Joan is not supposed to be (consciously) aware of what she's doing in the morally relevant sense. Nor could she easily *become* consciously aware of this, in the sense in which we can summon up a standing belief that is not currently present to consciousness. Which raises the interesting question of whether, and in what way, manipulative behavior might be thought to require intent. And would Joan's case (if it is thought to be psychologically plausible, and to be a plausible case of manipulation) obviate this requirement?

Not necessarily. For, as Marcia Baron points out (this volume), the claim that manipulative behavior requires intent permits of several importantly different readings. The strongest possible version of this claim would be that manipulative actions must always be done with the conscious *de dicto* intention of manipulating the target into doing, thinking, or feeling some fairly specific thing. That is, there must be a conscious intention to be manipulative as such, or under that very description. I take it that few theorists would buy a claim quite this strong. One can presumably be a manipulative person without having the concept feature prominently in one's mental lexicon. Children of a young age can be serial offenders when it comes to manipulation. And even adults do not usually manipulate their victims with a Machiavellian declaration of manipulative intent.

But Robert Noggle has endorsed a slightly weaker claim in the vicinity, to the effect that manipulative actions must always be done with a conscious *de dicto* intention to do something which is at least conceptually close to being manipulation, or perhaps even constitutes the correct conceptual analysis thereof. Noggle suggests that it would be counterintuitive to suppose that manipulative actions can be performed unknowingly.²⁰

20. Noggle doesn't say much to explain why he thinks this. But he does suggest in passing that "it makes little sense to prohibit someone from acting manipulatively if she is unable to

And he subsequently moves to characterize manipulative actions in terms of the associated intention, such that an act counts as manipulative if and only if the agent intends to lead the target *astray*—that is, away from what the agent takes to be the ideal thing for the target to do, think, or feel.²¹

I think that Noggle's account of manipulation runs into several problems, not least of which is that manipulative people often seem to me to be trying to push their targets into doing, thinking, or feeling precisely what the manipulative person thinks they should. Joan's case plausibly illustrates this. She behaves manipulatively towards her relatives in order to get them to feel as guilty about their behavior towards her as she at least implicitly thinks they should.²² It might be argued that she takes their envisaged guilt to be the right emotional state for them to be in, but on the basis of the wrong reasons. I'm not convinced that this is so though, since Joan's gifts are meant to serve as a pointed *reminder* (as well as adding to the stock) of what she might take to be exemplary reasons for her relatives to feel guilty about not paying her more attention. Each dollar she spends on them is essentially an investment in augmenting her sense of moral injury, and so *ought* to make them feel guiltier and guiltier, by her own lights. What a generous person she is! And how selfless, how lonely. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. They *still* haven't called, despite her always being so nice. This also serves to highlight another reason why Noggle's account – according to which manipulative actions have to be done from a “certain kind of insincere, conniving intention” – seems likely to be too narrow, as well as overly rationalistic.²³ People like Joan cannot afford to go around consciously

tell when she is doing so”; “Manipulative Actions,” 48. I am not sure that this is true: I can “prohibit”—or, at least, strongly discourage—someone from behaving insensitively, even though they will *ipso facto* be unaware that they are behaving insensitively when they are indeed doing so. For another thing, it becomes very difficult on Noggle's account to tell whether one person has manipulated another (since they have to “look into their own hearts” to see whether they were intending to lead their target astray; “Manipulative Actions,” 51). So a straightforward prohibition turns out to be off the table anyway.

21. Noggle, “Manipulative Actions,” 48. It also seems clear from his discussion that he does not mean to allow that unconscious intentions (the possibility of which are not mentioned) might suffice to play this role.

22. Moreover, it's not clear to me that unremittingly narcissistic manipulators will typically have any real conception of how their targets would ideally be, independently of what they would prefer for them to be like. However, see Barnhill, “What Is Manipulation,” this volume, for a more sympathetic take on Noggle's account of manipulation, along with several proposed amendments to it.

23. Noggle, “Manipulative Actions,” 48.

getting the knives out. It would spoil the whole plot, in which they have cast themselves as victims.

In the present volume, Baron offers a helpful discussion of the *mens rea* of manipulation. Having introduced the question of whether manipulation requires intent, she suggests that an affirmative answer will generally hold when this claim is cashed out in a nuanced way. Baron explicitly rejects the above claim that an agent who behaves manipulatively towards another must have an intention to manipulate her target under that description—that is, what I am calling a manipulative intention *de dicto*. But this leaves open the possibility that she must have an intention to perform some action which is in fact manipulative, which I will call a manipulative intention *de re*. Baron initially considers in this vein the possibility that manipulative actions require the intention of leading the other to do something, via means which would in fact be manipulative. This requirement could hold whether or not the person thinks of these actions as *being* manipulative, or even as being attempts to lead the target *astray*, à la Noggle. But Baron goes on to suggest that even this requirement is likely to be too strong. For, agents behaving manipulatively may merely be *reckless* in pursuit of the goal of getting their target to do something. The idea is that manipulative actions can stem merely from “a determination to bring about a particular result and a willingness to be very pushy or somewhat deceptive to reach that result.”²⁴ So agents need not intend to take the manipulative means to the relevant end here.

But maybe agents nonetheless have to be determined to bring about a particular result, or to pursue the relevant end, the achievement of which is a suitable *actus reus* to make for a manipulative action. And Baron does want to hang onto a claim in this vicinity—namely, that manipulation will at least generally involve an intention to get the other to do something (or to think or feel something, as I take it she would also want to allow).²⁵ Joan’s case would be compatible with this requirement under the assumption that there are genuine intentions which are at least to some extent unconscious, with Joan’s motive being one such.²⁶ For, Joan does not consciously intend

24. Marcia Baron, “The *Mens Rea*,” this volume, xxx.

25. See Baron, “Manipulativeness,” 45.

26. This is a possibility which Baron and I are both at least friendly to (although as I noted in opening, I want to leave room for theorists to hold that intentions themselves have to be conscious, and that cases like Joan’s involve unconscious motives of a somewhat different kind). Whereas Baron wants to explicitly allow for the possibility that intentions can be unconscious; see “Manipulativeness,” 51, n.9. Thanks to Marcia for extremely helpful

to make her relatives feel guilty—which is the description under which her action might count as being manipulative. To be clear, Joan’s actions are certainly done with a conscious intention under other descriptions. For example, she consciously intends to buy her relatives extravagant gifts for their birthdays. But shopping for a gift on Amazon does not a manipulative action make—that is, it does not in itself constitute a suitable *actus reus* here. So the end which Joan is consciously pursuing in acting as she does is not suitably manipulative. And the end which is suitably manipulative—namely, making her relatives feel guilty—is not something which she’s conscious of in acting as she does.²⁷

One might now naturally wonder whether this unconscious intention or otherwise opaque motive (however one wants to think about it, exactly) must at least be *available* to Joan’s consciousness, in order for her actions to count as being manipulative. Or to count as being blameworthy, which may amount to much the same thing, if one is taking manipulation to be a moralized or thick concept.²⁸ I’ll circle back to such questions a bit later on.

But whatever the case, I think that we can lack control over our own manipulative behavior in still deeper ways. For, as well as behaving manipulatively despite not consciously intending to, I think that people can behave manipulatively despite consciously intending *not* to. Or so the following example is intended to suggest.

III

“My whole life I’ve been a fraud. I’m not exaggerating. Pretty much all I’ve ever done all the time is try to create a certain impression of me in other people. Mostly to be liked or admired.” So begins David Foster Wallace’s story, “Good Old Neon.”²⁹ The protagonist, Neal, talks about his motive

discussions about her views here, which I had originally misunderstood, having overlooked this important caveat.

27. Although, without a suitably manipulative end in mind, it seems plausible to think that her actions would not count as being manipulative, although they might still leave her relatives *feeling* as if they had been treated manipulatively. I am therefore sympathetic to the upshot of Baron’s nice discussion, “The *Mens Rea*,” this volume, of the difference on this score between being manipulative and being intimidating, along with the difference between manipulating versus insulting someone.

28. See, e.g., Baron and Wood, both this volume, for discussions of this issue, on which I needn’t commit myself one way or the other here.

29. Foster Wallace, David. “Good Old Neon,” in *Oblivion: Stories* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004), 141.

“deep down” in getting good grades in school and doing well in sports as having been merely to have the transcript and the varsity letters to show for it. He wants to do well simply in order to impress people, and he doesn’t feel much of anything when he does get what he wants. All there is is the fear that he won’t be able to get it again. Even his first sexual encounter is mired in self-consciousness and subsequent self-disgust. “Now I’m the guy that Mead let get to second with her,” he thinks in the heat of the moment. He kicks himself afterwards that this was his primary thought, and that he subsequently never really felt “the soft aliveness or whatever of her breast.”³⁰ The girl in question failed to make much of an impression generally. “I couldn’t see anything except who I might be in her eyes.”³¹

Neal tries many different things in an effort to stop being or at least feeling like a fraud, all throughout his twenties. These include “EST, riding a ten-speed to Nova Scotia and back, hypnosis, cocaine, sacro-cervical chiropractic, joining a charismatic church, jogging, pro bono work for the Ad Council, meditation classes, the Masons, analysis, the Landmark Forum, the Course in Miracles, a right-brain drawing workshop, celibacy, collecting and restoring vintage Corvettes, and trying to sleep with a different girl every night for two straight months.”³² Finally, Neal signs up for some intensive psychotherapy.

But Neal runs into the usual problem which besets people who are, or at least think they are, more intelligent than their therapists. He immediately sets out to create a certain impression of himself in Dr. Gustafson, to “lead him around by the nose.” “And yet I wanted help and really was there to try to get help,” Neal reports.³³ After six months, he finally tells his therapist about feeling like a fraud and feeling alienated from himself. (“I had to use this uptown word of course, but it was still the truth”).³⁴ He even admits that he has been trying to manipulate him all along. Dr. Gustafson smiles (knowingly?) and says: “If I understand you right, you’re saying that you’re basically a calculating, manipulative person who always says what you think will get somebody to approve of you or form some impression of you which you think you want.” Neal reluctantly agrees that this is

30. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 141.

31. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 142.

32. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 142–43.

33. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 143.

34. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 144.

accurate, if “a little simplistic.”³⁵ He confesses that “this fraudulent, calculating part of my brain [is] firing away all the time, as if I were constantly playing chess with everybody and figuring out that if I wanted them to move a certain way I had to move in such a way as to induce them to move that way.”³⁶ It’s as good a description of an unremittingly manipulative outlook as any that I’ve heard.

To Neal’s bitter disappointment, Dr. Gustafson goes on say exactly the sort of thing that Neal would have expected him to say all along—namely that, in sincerely confessing to always being a fraudulent and manipulative person, he has at last said something sincere, thereby proving that he can do it—that he really is capable of behaving non-manipulatively. But, as Neal is quick to observe, the conclusion does not follow. A true confession can still be fraudulent and manipulative if the aim is not to expose yourself or reveal a piece of who you are, but merely to be *seen* to expose yourself or reveal a piece of who you are—such that the truth of what you reveal is more or less incidental.³⁷ That Dr. Gustafson does not cotton onto this possibility “was depressing, much the way that discovering somebody is easy to manipulate is depressing.”³⁸ Neal has been hoping that someone will be able to see through his act. At this point in the story, he gives up on trying to get help. He instead tells his therapist that the therapy is really helping—partly out of pity for him, partly out of boredom—meanwhile planning to kill himself. His “exhausting and solipsistic” mindset has become too much for him to bear.³⁹

To cut a long story short, Neal does kill himself. (I’m not ruining the plot; you find this out at the beginning.) As he’s preparing to do so, he watches himself writing a final letter to his sister, Fern, who is the one person he seems to care about. And yet:

I won’t pretend it was fully authentic or genuine. . . . A part of me was still calculating, performing—and this was part of the ceremonial

35. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 145.

36. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 145–46.

37. Neal also talks about the “paradox,” which he thought of during a mathematical logic class in college, that the more you become aware of being a fraud, the harder you will try to appear authentic to others, and the more fraudulent you become—and become aware of being; Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 147.

38. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 155.

39. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 155.

quality of that last afternoon. Even as I wrote my note to Fern, for instance, expressing sentiments and regrets that were real, a part of me was noticing what a fine and sincere note it was, and anticipating the effect on Fern of this or that heartfelt phrase, while yet another part was observing the whole scene of a man in a dress shirt and no tie sitting at his breakfast nook writing a heartfelt note on his last afternoon alive, the blondwood table's surface trembling with sunlight and the man's hand steady and face both haunted by regret and ennobled by resolve, this part of me sort of hovering above and just to the left of myself, evaluating the scene, and thinking what a fine and genuine-seeming performance in a drama it would make if only we all had not already been subject to countless scenes just like it in dramas ever since we first saw a movie or read a book, which somehow entailed that real scenes like the one of my suicide note were now compelling and genuine only to their participants, and to anyone else would come off as banal and even somewhat cheesy or maudlin, which is somewhat paradoxical when you consider—as I did, sitting there at the breakfast nook—that the reason scenes like this will seem stale or manipulative to an audience is that we've already seen so many of them in dramas, and yet the reason we've seen so many of them in dramas is that the scenes really are dramatic and compelling and let people communicate very deep, complicated emotional realities that are almost impossible to articulate in any other way, and at the same time still another facet or part of me realizing that from this perspective my own basic problem was that at an early age I'd somehow chosen to cast my lot with my life's drama's supposed audience instead of with the drama itself, and that I even now was watching and gauging my supposed performance's quality and probable effects, and thus was in the final analysis the very same manipulative fraud writing the note to Fern that I had been throughout the life that had brought me to this climactic scene.⁴⁰

The curtain falls; we all applaud; and the house lights go up.⁴¹

40. Foster Wallace, "Good Old Neon," 175–76.

41. Although there are interesting questions about the extent to which Neal might be a distinctively modern character, who owes his neuroses more to the ubiquity of television than the performativity of life in general (as the last passage clearly hints at; and this was also a preoccupation of Foster Wallace's more generally). The story also messes around with the

Neal's case suggests that not only can people behave manipulatively while not consciously intending to—as Joan's case was meant to illustrate—but people can even behave manipulatively despite consciously intending not to. For we can watch ourselves act, as if from the perspective of a third party, it seems. And we can even watch ourselves watching ourselves—that is, be conscious of that self-consciousness—and so on without limit. It may wind up being unclear who we're acting, or performing, for. And, even when we feel ourselves to be the most spontaneous, to be the most ourselves, we may suspect ourselves of merely playing the part of someone who is *not* playing the part.⁴² Such can be our predicament as both self-conscious and social creatures—which is to say, as the only animals who can perform for our own benefit, and stand back and watch the show, as both actor and audience.

IV

Is Joan to blame for her manipulative behavior? Is Neal responsible for being the way he is? I don't have anything definitive to offer by way of answers here. Let me just canvass a few reasons why I am in two minds about such questions.

First we should consider the obvious complications. Joan is not aware (or is not consciously aware, if one can hear a difference here) that she's behaving manipulatively, we're supposing. But she may or may not be able to figure this out by reflecting on her own behavior, or perhaps by being called to account as to what she's doing and why. One previously mentioned possibility is that Joan in fact couldn't become aware of her manipulative tendencies without their being extinguished in the process.

reader in a way that would be fun but for certain obvious and sad parallels between fiction and reality. But we are clearly meant to wonder: What is Neal attempting to get us to think of him here? Or is this really his one true confession? Plus there's an eerie twist at the end—which I won't spoil for you. Thanks to Adam Kelly for suggesting I read the story in the first place, and for an interesting subsequent discussion about the nature of secular confessions.

42. Similarly with displays of emotions which are sometimes beyond one's conscious control—but, crucially, not always. (Or one may at least have conscious control over getting into a position where you know you might really lose it.) For example, one may seriously ask oneself, after having burst out crying in front of someone and still in the midst of tears: Why am I actually crying? Am I crying because I am upset, or (at least partly) because I want to show you how upset I am? Cf. Velleman's example of crying as an authentic display, in playing the part of oneself; J. David Velleman, *How We Get Along* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.

Suppose that Joan is a relatively and/or self-consciously conscientious person, who knows very well that manipulation is generally wrong, and also has a robust sense of what such behavior generally includes. Then it might be that her becoming aware of her opaque motive of making her relatives feel guilty by sending them expensive birthday gifts would render it more or less impossible for her to continue down this road—at least if we were to hold fixed her moral personality. For it would destroy her sense of herself as the martyr in this story. This would plausibly matter when it comes to assigning blame here. For, while we might be critical of Joan’s tendency towards martyrdom, or her capacity for blindness as to what she’s really doing, it would at least be nice to know that she wouldn’t do this consciously. That is, she wouldn’t set out to do things which would make her relatives feel guilty. This might make her all the more dogmatic though in insisting that she has no such ulterior motive in acting as she does. How could she even be suspected of this? For, she might insist, she is not a manipulative sort of person. And, as far as she’s aware, she isn’t—given that she is effectively inclined to look the other way while she does manipulative things.⁴³

On the other hand, Neal is all too well aware of what he’s doing, obviously. But he doesn’t seem to be able to change his manipulative ways. It is virtually compulsive behavior: “I just couldn’t seem to stop,” he says.⁴⁴ And if ‘ought’ implies ‘can’... well, you see where this is going. But it should also be recorded that Neal’s relationships with others sound morally none too pretty. He recalls of his former lover, Beverly: “She said she’d never felt the gaze of someone so penetrating, discerning, and yet totally empty of care, like she was a puzzle or problem I was figuring out. She said it was thanks to me that she’d discovered the difference between being penetrated and really known versus penetrated and just violated.” Yikes.

Beverly’s indictment of Neal also brings out a potentially important difference between him and Joan. Whereas Neal sees people in a calculating, objectifying way—especially according to his former lover—Joan very well may not. People like Joan do not necessarily behave manipulatively

43. This sort of reasoning can also occur in second and third-person cases—often with pernicious results. He isn’t the type to do that; so therefore, he didn’t. Cognitive dissonance is thereby avoided. We see this pattern of reasoning being deployed to ironic effect by Antony in *Julius Caesar*: “But Brutus says he was ambitious; and Brutus is an honorable man.” By *modus tollens*... Thanks to Daniel Manne for pointing out this sort of inference to me, and connecting it with the play.

44. Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” 143.

out of a sense of entitlement or contempt for other people, let alone a Machiavellian sense that these others are puppets or pawns in their own schemes.⁴⁵ In some ways, it is the opposite. For, people like Joan behave manipulatively as the result of feeling that they have lost control, or that they have been written off themselves. They are trying to regain some power from a position of felt powerlessness, in admittedly unseemly ways. This is not to say that Joan envisages her relatives in a morally healthy way, of course. One is tempted to say that there is a kind of object permanence that is missing here, at the level of their personhood. They pop into and out of existence for Joan insofar as they figure in *her* life—that is, as injurious to her, having little by way of their own acknowledged independent reality. But it may be difficult for Joan to recover her sense of their reality when they very seldom visit. It's not personal, we might say to Joan, but in way that is the problem. And there is also the simple point that people like Joan behave manipulatively because of real emotional vulnerabilities and unmet psychic needs of theirs (of which more later on). In which case, we might be inclined to try to acknowledge the reality of the sin without placing much blame on the sinner.

There is another reason for being hesitant to blame Joan for what she's doing. Suppose, as is easy enough to imagine, that her manipulative tendencies are more or less isolated to her passive aggressive gift-giving. Now, why might this be the case? Plausibly, the uncertain social meaning of giving someone a gift helps to create and sustain such motivational ambiguities. For, giving someone a gift is quite a bit more complicated than merely causing them to have some new object in their life.⁴⁶ It says something to the other person about their value or prospective value to you. In this case, it says "You mean so much to me." But whether this is an

45. Cf. Buss, who says that an agent who behaves in an excessively controlling fashion is treating his target as "a character in his plot, rather than as someone with whom he shares the world, someone whose plot interacts with his own in ways he has not himself plotted"; Buss, "Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons," 229. Joan does not seem quite like this though, on grounds I'll go on to suggest. But I do think that this is an insightful characterization of how some manipulative people, like Neal, tend to view and treat others. I see Neal as a non-Machiavellian character not because of how he thinks about others, but because of how he thinks about how he thinks about others—namely, with self-loathing and a real desire to change, albeit primarily for his own sake.

46. This point was first brought to my attention by a wonderful talk by Barbara Herman that I heard, entitled (as I recall) "Doing Too Much," in which she cited gift-giving as an example of a social practice in which doing too much (i.e., going 'over the top') can be just as problematic as doing too little.

overture or an unspoken rebuke can sometimes be hard to discern. And sometimes a gift really is just a gift, of course. All this gives Joan what is often and suggestively called ‘plausible deniability.’ That is, she can credibly go on telling not only others but also herself that she’s doing one thing (i.e., being generous) while actually doing another (i.e., being manipulative). The ambiguous nature of gift-giving helps her keep up the charade.

Still, as I suggested earlier, it would nevertheless make sense if Joan’s relatives were becoming increasingly irritated with her manipulative behavior. And we can make their irritation, even anger, seem quite reasonable by telling *their* side of the story, which has gone untold so far. For, while it is true that they live but a four-hour drive from Joan, they have very little money and even less by way of time. And crucially, they don’t drive. In reality, going to visit Joan is an eight-hour ordeal involving a taxi, a train, and two long bus rides. This is not the real reason, though, why they don’t visit her more often—although this may be what they tell each other and even themselves. But the truth is that Joan has never been an easy person to get along with. She is prickly and unpredictable, and wants people to go visit her but then tires of their company quickly. She has gone to little effort when they’ve visited her in the past. She is also liable to make little hurtful comments, to slip in snide remarks, about what they’re doing with their lives—and what is it that they’re wearing? It is quite a flattering outfit, since they’ve put on a little weight. A backhanded compliment if ever there was one.

Against such a backdrop, it would at least make psychological sense that Joan’s gifts have gradually come to provoke exasperation and even anger in her relatives. For, they have cottoned onto what she’s trying to do, even though Joan herself has not. Perhaps they have even asked her nicely not to spend so much money, since they cannot hope to reciprocate. They are annoyed that she’s ignored them. And, more deeply, they wish that Joan would just come out and ask that they see each other more regularly, if that is really what she wants. And it isn’t clear that it is. More likely, she is ambivalent—lonely but also hostile, and keener on having visitors in theory than in practice.

So the resentment here is mutual. And this attitude might seem not only understandable but also entirely reasonable on the part of Joan’s relatives. This is good evidence, I take it, that what she is doing is somewhat blameworthy. Maybe we were just hesitant to assign blame to her because she is a rather pathetic figure. Who might nonetheless be to blame for acting as she does.

This possibility is bolstered by the observation that many theorists think that there is no general barrier to the moral assessment of actions which are done without a suitable *de dicto* moral motive. Consider Huck Finn-type cases, which have recently been quite discussed in the literature on moral worth or virtue (the flipside of the current coin). Huck Finn believes that he ought to turn Jim over to the slave-hunters, but ends up dissembling to protect him, much to his own surprise. Huck is subsequently disgusted by his own putatively immoral behavior, in failing to help return Jim to his “rightful owner.”⁴⁷ But Huck nevertheless seems to deserve some moral praise for protecting Jim, given that he appears to act out of good if inchoate moral instincts.⁴⁸ Admittedly, the case does not have quite the same structure as Joan’s case. For, Joan thinks that she is doing one thing (i.e., being generous) when she is actually doing another (i.e., being manipulative); whereas Huck intends to do one thing and winds up doing just the opposite. Still, one might think that if we can praise people for doing things which they don’t consciously set out to do, then there is no general problem with assigning blame on such basis either.

One might also think that Joan can be blamed for failing to do something which she *does* have conscious control over—namely, scrutinizing her own motives in acting as she does. That is, we might hold that people are responsible for undertaking a certain inner activity—that is, some sort of process of self-examination—on a semi-regular basis. In which case, Joan’s failure to recognize what she’s up to might be the result of something like moral negligence, and subsequent self-deception, which can be criticized accordingly. Similarly, we might criticize her for not being more attuned to her relatives’ perspectives, and focusing mainly or exclusively on how they are treating *her*. The thought being that her resentment would quickly dissipate, and her manipulative behavior would wane, if she were more sensitive and imaginative about what is going on in their

47. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2010), 103.

48. For some interesting recent discussions, see, e.g., Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*; and Julia Markovits, “Acting for the Right Reasons,” *Philosophical Review* 19, no. 2 (2010): 201–42. The case was originally introduced to the literature by Jonathan Bennett, in “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” *Philosophy* 49, no. 188 (1974): 123–34. I offer my own take on the case in my “On Being Social in Metaethics,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 8, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50–73.

lives. Her brother might be going through a nasty divorce at the moment. And the kids might be busy with school and their college applications. Not to mention that it would represent a sixteen-hour round trip for them.

But there are reasons to hesitate to add the duty to engage in such self-examination to the list of other duties we might plausibly be thought to have. For it's just not clear that the undifferentiated activity of self-examination will get us very far here. "Know thyself" is almost as general as a piece of advice as the mandate "Be good," and it seems little more useful. We may be just as likely to end up rationalizing our own behavior, or reinforcing our own sense of victimhood, as we are to end up admitting that we are behaving rather badly. We may also wind up rationalizing away our own attempts at rationalization. But it does seem wise in general to at least make an effort to be conscious of our own desires and fantasies, and mindful of the ways in which our actions might be clumsy attempts to play them out. We can readily imagine, for example, that Joan fantasizes about her relatives coming to feel guilty about the way they have neglected her. At the more extreme end of things, she might find herself vividly imagining them being wracked with guilt at her funeral—if they bother to show up, that is, she thinks with real self-pity. But she never makes the connection between this maudlin fantasy of hers (and make no mistake, it is a fantasy, despite its grim content) and the reaction she tacitly supposes they might have upon opening her gifts—namely, abject guilt. The suggested lesson is this, then: we should be careful what we wish for, and the ways in which our actions might constitute attempts at wish fulfillment.⁴⁹

Reflection of this kind is still quite hard to do, though, especially just on one's own. It is surely no accident that Neal sought therapy, and perhaps even that we can picture Joan most easily as being socially rather isolated. For, our opaque motives and hidden agendas will often come out more readily in conversation with others. Sometimes the sheer act of explaining ourselves to another person helps us to better understand, or

49. Iris Murdoch is particularly lucid on the moral liability that one's self-serving fantasies represent, and went so far as to claim that "the chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams, which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one." Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 59. She also explains that what seems "true and important" to her in Freudian theory is that the psyche is "an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control. Introspection reveals only the deep tissue of ambivalent motive, and fantasy is a stronger force than reason," 51.

forces us to face up to, what we are actually doing. And some people will also be able to bring certain patterns of behavior to our attention, or call us out regarding a suspicious amount of dovetailing between our unspoken desires and the likely results of our behavior. Provided that our unspoken desires aren't too hard to glean, of course—which oftentimes they won't be, at least to a person who knows us well.

But nor should we overstate the potential corrective influence of others here. On the contrary, some people seem to seek out others who can be relied upon to chip away at their conscience, or their sense of obligation, thereby relieving “the moral burden” (to borrow Michael Stocker's phrase). A wonderful scene at the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* helps to bring this out.⁵⁰ Mr. John Dashwood initially proposes to take three thousand pounds of his own fortune, and give it to his father's widow and her daughters, his half-sisters. Mrs. John Dashwood does not approve of this plan, though, and is determined to talk him out of it. And Mr. Dashwood surely has an inkling of this going into the discussion, given the alacrity with which he seizes on each of his wife's proffered counter-claims and spurious objections—all the while maintaining an air of utmost conscientiousness. Their exchange begins like this:

“It was my father's last request to me,” replied her husband, “that I should assist his widow and daughters.”

“He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses, he could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child.”

“He did not stipulate for any particular sum, my dear Fanny; he only requested me, in general terms, to assist them, and make their situation more comfortable than it was in his power to do. Perhaps it would have been as well if he had left it wholly to myself. He could hardly suppose I should neglect them. But as he required the promise, I could not do less than give it; at least I thought so at the time. The promise, therefore, was given, and must be performed. Something must be done for them whenever they leave Norland and settle in a new home.”

50. Jane Austen. *Sense and Sensibility* (New York: Dover, 1996), originally published in 1811.

“Well, then, *let* something be done for them; but *that* something need not be three thousand pounds. Consider,” she added, “that when the money is once parted with, it never can return. Your sisters will marry, and it will be gone forever. If, indeed, it could be restored to our poor little boy—”

“Why, to be sure,” said her husband, very gravely, “that would make great difference. The time may come when Harry will regret that so large a sum was parted with. If he should have a numerous family, for instance, it would be a very convenient addition.”

“To be sure it would.”

“Perhaps, then, it would be better for all parties, if the sum were diminished one half. Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious increase to their fortunes!”

“Oh! Beyond anything great! What brother on earth would do half so much for his sisters, even if *really* his sisters! And as it is—only half blood!—But you have such a generous spirit!”⁵¹

You can see where this is going. Eventually Mrs. Dashwood talks Mr. Dashwood out of giving his relatives so much as a penny. Between them they decide that the destitute widow is perfectly comfortable as she is—if anything, the obligation is the other way around. She should be giving *them* money, since she is practically rolling in it. In the film version, it is also hinted that being any richer would be detrimental to their characters.

This scene brings out a further complication when it comes to manipulative motives and the assignment of moral blame. Namely, sometimes the motive behind a manipulative action is not merely the agent’s own. Mr. and Mrs. Dashwood are about as selfish as each other, but Mrs. Dashwood is clearly the more cutthroat of the pair. And Mr. Dashwood seems to solicit or at least welcome her in her ruthlessness to absolve him of his scruples. They are easily dispatched with – or, rather, redirected. Here, as elsewhere, other people can enable us to let ourselves go, morally. And not just morally. Who here has not upon occasion allowed our dining companion to convince us to order a dessert to share, or at least to have a taste of theirs? (“Well, if you’re going to twist my arm. . .”) And then proceeded to polish it off.

51. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 5.

V

Manipulative actions have naturally been connected, as we've been seeing throughout, to a tendency to be conniving and calculating, and to objectify other people.⁵² They have also been identified as one end of a spectrum which runs from manipulation to *bona fide* coercion.⁵³ And in many ways this is right, of course. But I think there are other connections which deserve emphasis here as well, and which somewhat complicate the moral landscape, in practice and in theory. I've suggested in particular that there are common psychological connections between manipulation and vulnerability and the sense of being powerless. For example, manipulative behavior is often a cry for attention—attention that may genuinely be owed to the person crying out for it. And it is also one end of a continuum which runs from manipulation to the mere anxiety to please, or to win the approval of others, by altering one's usual mode of self-presentation.

There might be a temptation to summarily declare that people should be more honest or authentic, rather than resorting to such underhanded tactics in order to get their due or to appear in the best light. And there is obviously something residually unattractive about manipulative behavior and manipulative people generally.⁵⁴ Yet we can readily imagine that Joan simply has too much to lose by admitting to her relatives—or even to herself—that she is inwardly very lonely, that she needs more human contact. We might imagine that, as she knows, her requests or even pleas would have very little effect on them. For, while her relatives are not callous, they are also rather selfish, and they have their own lives to lead. And admitting that you need something and may not be able to get it can be emotionally

52. See, e.g., Noggle, "Manipulative Actions"; Buss, "Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons"; and Baron, "The *Mens Rea*," this volume.

53. See Wood, "Coercion, Manipulation, Exploitation," this volume.

54. So I don't take myself to be disagreeing with Baron here, when she says that, although manipulative actions are sometimes warranted, "being a manipulative person is never a good thing" in itself; Baron, "Manipulativeness," 37. I suspect that it's more a question of emphasis—where here, I am looking to emphasize the degree to which being manipulative can at least be understandable, as a psychological matter. Baron has room to allow this though. Indeed, she herself notes in closing that "reliance on such [manipulative] techniques may be due to powerlessness, and may be a reaction to being viewed as less than fully rational. For such people—for many children, and in the past and all too often in the present, women—perhaps the only means of persuading the other is to badger, beg, cajole, flatter, or lie," 50.

pretty devastating. It can also be humiliating to ask without receiving. So Joan acts out instead, much as a child might.

Neal is admittedly a much less sympathetic character than Joan. Even so, he might be thought to evince an extreme version of a rather natural tendency. Most of us care quite a bit—perhaps more than we would care to admit—about what others think of us. And there is a fine line between trying to show others our good sides, or live up to their expectations, versus putting on a show or trying to control what they think of us in a manipulative manner. And it isn't always clear to us which it is we're doing. Am I saying what I think, or saying what you want to hear, which I also happen to think? Do I in fact think this? Or am I just used to saying it, primarily for your benefit?

And is it always illicit to edit ourselves for others? Surely not—and as I'd presume almost everyone would acknowledge.⁵⁵ Yet we may underestimate the extent to which even being relatively unguarded and disinclined to put on a performance may be something of a luxury. People with little power often have to be quite careful, even crafty, about the image of themselves they're projecting into the world. People with unfamiliar faces in an environment may need to wear a mask in it, to be more or less expressionless, or to wear a little smile.⁵⁶ And sometimes one does not merely withhold one's thoughts and feelings, or refrain from behaving in the ways that one would ordinarily tend to. One positively embellishes or affects a certain attitude, in order to create a certain impression of oneself. Moreover, very different personae may need to be adopted in order to put one's best foot forward under different sorts of circumstances. Being two-faced generally gets a bad rap, of course. But people with multiple identities may need multiple faces, and to cultivate the ability to switch seamlessly between them.

Your face can also freeze in an expression slanted towards the world you inhabit with the most energy. To mention an example uncomfortably close to home: one may find oneself attempting to play the part of the sort of woman who philosophers generally find congenial, or at least

55. As Baron also notes in her contribution to this volume, even Kant was surprisingly tolerant of polite dissembling in order to facilitate smoother social interactions; Baron, "The *Mens Rea*," this volume, x.

56. Although it should also be admitted that inscrutability can infuriate people. Women in particular are often required to be legible, interpretable, or as I have often heard it put, 'open.' So, sometimes, you can't win.

acceptable, upon entering the field. Forget the ‘one,’ actually; let’s talk about me. It has not escaped my attention that my voice has dropped a few registers, that my prosody is more measured now. I wear glasses; I didn’t used to. I am embarrassed to admit that my original Australian accent has gotten a bit weaker, notwithstanding my desire to keep it. Or do I actually want this? Am I in fact guilty of unconscious cultural cringe? More likely, I have unconsciously picked up on and unwittingly come to mimic the manner of the North American philosophers I primarily interact with and who I in some sense want to emulate.⁵⁷ I am particularly anxious to maintain a certain tone of voice, and a certain demeanor generally, during Q&A sessions—which teem with undercurrents of power, both toxic and exciting. A complicated mixture of assertiveness and relaxedness feels like the thing to aim for, regardless of how relaxed or unrelaxed I might feel (a distinction which becomes increasingly hard to make out, since feelings follow actions). Subsequent conversations have suggested to me that some people have come away believing that I am much more confident than I am. And quite likely this has worked to my advantage, for the most part. I admit, I don’t agonize over it. I am not going to try to change—or at least, not anytime soon. And I wouldn’t go so far as to call my behavior manipulative, albeit inadvertently so. But then again, who knows? Not me, quite possibly.

57. That some people are chameleons when it comes to picking up other accents apparently has a neurological basis. Or so I have been told. My (Australian) family and (American) spouse rightly poke gentle fun at me for being eager to point this out though, as I am admittedly wont to do. And as I have indeed just done.

