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Individuality, Identity, and Relation: Ontological and Moral Dilemmas

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Introduction

When first thinking about doing this project, the first question I had to answer was exactly what it was that I wanted to spend a semester writing, reading, and thinking about. In order to consider this question more clearly, I decided to think about exactly what it was that I thought philosophy is supposed to accomplish. I decided that philosophy, if nothing else, should provide and create ordered systems by which we structure the nature of our experiences. As such, it is closely related to other areas of the human pursuit of knowledge -- such as art and science. Just because we use philosophy to order our experiences does not mean, however, that we construct our world. I think that the world, independent of what we happen to think about it, resists this sort of action. However, we are quite capable of paying closer attention to particular aspects of this world. We do not create the world, but we can shape greatly how it is that we think about it.

I began my project with Plato's Parmenides, a late dialogue that can be seen as a discussion of how it is that we draw things together into groups and separate them out into particulars. Plato uses very abstract notions and terms to discuss this issue -- words like "oneness" and "manyness." But I think that one more specific way of understanding what these ideas mean is through a pursuit of an understanding of the nature of the individual. Knowledge of and experience with human individuals involve similar notions to the abstract issues that Plato discusses. I began to question who exactly individuals are. I read some of the writings of psychologist and philosopher William James, as well as a story by his brother, Henry James. Through a comparison of these works, I arrived at some general conclusions about the nature of the individual. I was not content, as William James is, however, to disregard the existence of true individuality, or a "self of selves," within our experience.
Though William James's arguments are well-thought and quite convincing, his conclusions are very counter-intuitive. I found it hard to accept the notion of individuals existing only as nexus points within a web of relations. This picture disregards the stable nature of individuality we seem to perceive and conflicts directly with our experience. I did find, however, the "self of selves" within "The Tree of Knowledge," a short story by Henry James. I came to the conclusion that individuals do really seem to exist independently of their relations. Pursuing thoughts in this direction, I found myself unsatisfied, however, with a radical separation of the self from the relations in which that self stands.

I think that a better picture of what it means to recognize individuality involves placing some, but not all, weight of identity on the relations we hold to others. I propose a model where general descriptions and relations held will never capture fully the individual, but will help to indicate him or her. Think of arrows pointing to a location in space. These arrows represent general descriptive terms and relations held. They give us clues of where to look to find the individual, but they do not fully capture the individual. Part of what it means to be an individual, I argue, is to avoid a final capture by means of these indicative arrows. I propose a kind of intuitive leap to a different kind of understanding. We use these arrows to guide us in the right direction, but, at some point, we make a qualitative shift in the kind of knowledge we have regarding the person we are coming to know.

In the final phase of this project, I returned to the notion mentioned earlier of exactly what areas of our experience we pay attention to. There are various important aspects of the individual. The arrows we have to indicate an individual, however, are only particular manifestations of one's true self. With ideas inspired by Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, I argue that to act virtuously is to pay attention to not just the particular manifestations of an individual, but to look beyond to see that which is expressing itself in the world in this way. Finally, to
hold these sort of relations is what truly makes us human, and what allows us to be moral creatures. We can make important decisions because we are individuals with wills and the ability to make choices, and through a cultivation of understanding caused by standing in important relations to others we are more inclined to further our own sense of our selves, and become more fully who we are.
In the *Parmenides*, Plato considers some of the problems in his doctrine of the ideas. He does this primarily through the dialogue between a youthful Socrates and the aged Parmenides. Curiously, however, even though Plato expresses some doubts about his theory of the forms, he nevertheless continues to use a stylistic device expressing some belief in a hierarchy of being. As in other dialogues, Plato uses a retelling of a retelling to convey the idea that what is being read is merely a reflection of what is most real and true. At the beginning of the work, Cephalus is looking for a man named Antiphon, who has heard a story from a man named Pythodorus. Pythodorus was present during a conversation involving Socrates, Zeno, and Parmenides. He then told this story to Antiphon, who, in turn, related it to Cephalus. Assuming that Cephalus is now telling this story to Plato, who is then recording it, the *Parmenides* is at least at a third remove.

This use of "removes" becomes interesting later in the dialogue when it becomes clear that Plato means to use this work to critique the idea of forms, and just how "removed" these forms can be from the phenomenal world. Perhaps by emphasizing the fact that the story heard is at several removes from the actual incident, Plato is showing that a retelling can be an accurate account of the original incident, as well as saying that objects of perception and their forms are not separated in the important way that Plato originally meant for them to be. In other words, a story can be removed quite distantly from the actual incident and nevertheless contained the essence of the original. In the same way, objects of everyday perception contain something of the essence of the forms.

Socrates begins his role in this dialogue by criticizing Parmenides and Zeno's theories concerning the nature of unity and plurality. Zeno puts forth
arguments that there is no plurality and Parmenides argues that all is a unity. Though their arguments lead to the same conclusion, they are not the same. This rather subtle point carries important consequences later in the dialogue when it is made clear through Parmenides that one must approach a problem from many sides to be properly "trained" in the art of argument. It is important that in order for an argument to be complete, one must be able to show how that argument's conclusions are defensible from various counterarguments, and that the conclusions must be approachable from more than one starting point. With these ideas in mind, Socrates argues against Parmenides and Zeno.

Socrates points out that unity depends on plurality and plurality depends on unity. Things which differ are alike insofar as they all differ. They thus share this common characteristic, which causes them to exhibit a certain degree of sameness. Things that are alike differ insofar as they are separable from each other. They are discrete entities, or else they could not be spoken of with plural terms. Thus, every object partakes of both unity and plurality. These very abstract concepts are mutually interrelated and one cannot exist without the other. In much the same way, objects in the realm of perception depend upon the forms for their being. It is exactly at this point that the young Socrates is questioned.

Parmenides begins to attack the assertion that the forms can be truly separate from the objects that partake of them. Socrates would like for the forms to be utterly separate from the realm of perception so as to make them unchangeable and indestructible, unlike the nature of the things that we perceive in the phenomenal world. It is questions regarding relations between the forms that initially give rise to these questions about the nature of being. It seems problematic to remove objects of phenomenal experience so far from the forms, and yet still say that they can be related in important ways.
Parmenides asks how it is that different things can partake of the forms without the unity of the forms being disrupted. If some part of the form of an object must reside in the object itself, it seems that the form would be splintered throughout all things related to that form. Thus, a form would not be able to retain the absolute unity necessary by its own definition. Socrates responds with an analogy describing how it is that a day can be in many places, and still be unified. It is important to notice that Socrates uses an idea of time to respond to Parmenides's criticism. Time is not contained by the three-dimensional thinking inherent in Parmenides' objection. Parmenides is thinking of the forms and their objects in physical terms, which is a mistake. In other words, it is not clear how a form permeate all things (including those things not associated with that form) in the same way that a day permeates and can be identified with all events that take place within that day. Nevertheless, Parmenides again tries to use a physical, three-dimensional model to describe the nature of the forms. He talks about how a sail can cover over things and in that way be a whole, but nevertheless touch all things to which it is related. Parmenides says that a form must be divisible, because parts of it end up in each partaking object. Thus, it seems that the forms must be divisible. Parmenides, in this example, continues to use a physical model that does not accurately describe the theory of the forms. The objects described in Socrates's theory do not have to possess some physical point at which they relate to a form, or idea. The objects "partake" of the forms in a non-physical way. It is the essence of the object that is directly related, or "partaking" of the form. Thus, Parmenides' objections formulated in physical terms are not serious problems for a defender of Socrates's theory.

Another argument is formulated at this point to show even further objections to Socrates' ideas. Parmenides says that if one holds to "largeness" and things being large, then these (the form and the particular) would then be unified
by yet another form. This proliferation would, eventually, lead to an infinite number of forms. Socrates tries to escape this problem by proposing that the forms exist in mind only, but Parmenides shows how it is that this problem would not be escaped by this hypothesis -- it would merely lead to an infinite explosion of the number of thoughts rather than the number of forms. Parmenides shows that the similarities between things can never stop being accounted for. Thus, the formal structures would continue to grow in number infinitely. Socrates concedes that some other account must be given expressing how the forms partake of the particulars.

The last argument against the theory of the forms arises from epistemic problems -- how it is that one can come to know the forms if they are truly separate from the realm of everyday experience. Parmenides says that just as the relations between objects of perception is a shadow of the relations between forms, so is knowledge of the forms. The relationship allowing us to have knowledge would not be perfect, and thus we would never have a knowledge relationship with the forms. Just as goodness exists in the realm of the forms and has a phenomenal reflection in instances of good actions and good characters, knowledge of the perceptual world is merely a reflection of a completely perfect knowledge that exists only in the realm of the forms. Thus, our knowledge is necessarily imperfect, and can only stand in relation to those things existing in the world of our phenomenal experience. In order to know anything about the world of the forms, we would have to bridge the gulf between the perfect and the imperfect. This task, however, is impossible with knowledge that can only relate to direct, perceptual experience.

Yet, it is said, one must have something upon "which to fix his thought" (Plato 929) or else "the significance of all discourse" (Plato 930) will be destroyed. What is meant here is that without some common ground and some fixed point to
pursue, discourse and thought would have no goal and we could not interact with each other in such a way as to convey any real meaning. The idea of dumping all common ground is unappealing, to say the least, but it seems that no other conclusion can be reached. The forms do not work. They cannot be both indestructible and separate. At this point, it must be remembered what was said at the outset of the dialogue. One must approach problems from a variety of angles, and then a more satisfying conclusion can be reached -- not giving up entirely on the idea of unifying aspects of our thoughts and experiences, but also not holding that the forms of a thing are absolute and unchanging.

In the latter part of the *Parmenides* in an attempt to see his problems from a different angle, Plato explores the nature of the relationship between the one and the many. He does this through a speech by Parmenides. This speech is provoked by a desire to further understand what Socrates means when he refers to a realm of ideas existing independently of the world of phenomenal experience. According to Socrates's theory (which is also Plato's theory), certain ideas, or forms (such as goodness) exist independently of certain phenomenal occurrences (such as a good action). In this relation, a good action would be part of the "many" that the form of goodness would be unifying into "one." Parmenides begins his questioning by exploring what it means to say that a "one" exists and how it would stand in relation to others that are not this "one."

Parmenides begins by saying that starting with only a "one" leads to that one having no characteristics. Because the one must be utterly unified, it cannot be said to have any parts, including characteristics such as likeness or difference, stability or change. Through the pursuit of this line of reasoning, Parmenides further concludes that the one cannot have any temporal characteristics, and thus words such as "was," "has become," "will be becoming," and "is" all have no relation to the one. Thus, it can be said that the one cannot possess being. In
other words, the one cannot be. Furthermore, because the one can have no characteristics, it cannot have a name, and thus cannot be spoken of, perceived, or known. These results are unsatisfactory. They contradict the actual happenings leading to these conclusions -- it cannot be the case that the one cannot be spoken of, because it has just been discussed, and, presumably, at least something can be known about it, because the speaker was talking intelligibly. Thus, it must be the case that we must talk of the one either being or not being. It is not enough to talk of the one being separate from these states, because without them, our talk becomes unintelligible.

Parmenides then begins with a one that is. This beginning leads to the idea that there must be at least two concepts involved here -- "oneness" and "being." Furthermore, these two concepts must also have oneness and being to be said to exist and to be unified. Nevertheless, these two concepts differ from each other. Thus, we already have similarity and difference, unity and plurality. From this limited number of concepts, we get an explosion of ideas, as it is considered that each can be thought of differently (as discrete ideas) or be unified through their similarities. Furthermore, the unities created can be further paired when drawn into comparison with other ideas. Because of this infinite number of comparisons, we are led to understand that all numbers must "necessarily be." Since all must numbers exist, there must be "an unlimited plurality of things". In this way, unity and being become "indefinitely numerous" (Plato 937). Thus, unity and being must have all possible characteristics, all similarities and all differences. With regard to time, the one both is and becomes older and younger than itself because the one must have all possible characteristics and stand in all possible relations. Parmenides takes these conclusions and begins to work down a logical path in an attempt to retrace his steps.
A one having all these characteristics must come into and go out of being at different points. The law of non-contradiction (central to Parmenides's desire to follow a completely logical train of thought) states that a concept cannot both have and not have a particular characteristic in the same way at the same time. Because the one must have all characteristics, even those which oppose each other such as being and not-being, the one must be in a state of change. In fact, this state of change must be constant (paradoxically) in order for the one to maintain an identity that is stable and unified. With these problematic conclusions in mind, Parmenides goes on to explore the nature of concepts other than the one.

Parmenides explores the nature of the "others" twice. Once, with the introduction of the question, "If there is a one, what must be true of the things other than the one?"; and, secondly, with another question, "Suppose then, that there is a one, what must be said of the things other than the one" (Plato 948)? On each questioning, Parmenides comes up with different conclusions. Neither set of conclusions, however, is satisfying. On the first exploration, Parmenides begins by saying that since everything separate from the one is unified in the sense of being different from the one, the others can be seen as parts of a complete whole. As such, each part must have a unity because each would be distinct from the others. The others, together, would be unlimited in number, but nevertheless contain all properties, just as the one (separate from the others) does. The others, then, become much like the one. Parmenides starts a new line of thinking starting from the proposition that the others are fundamentally separate from the one. Since the others are fundamentally separate from the one, they cannot be said to have any unity. Furthermore, the others cannot even be said to be many because the fact of their manyness would in this way unify them. Thus, if the others are seen as being fundamentally separate from the one, absolute incomprehensibility
results. The others cannot be seen to have any intelligible characteristics, and thus we do not really have an account at all.

Because beginning with the one existing has led to undesirable consequences, Parmenides begins again with the idea that the one does not exist. However, Parmenides says that because we can understand the idea that the one does not exist, then the one must be intelligible. In other words, there must be something knowable about the one. Parmenides then assumes that the one must be unlike the others, but must have likeness with regard to itself. Parmenides makes this assumption because he has a particular conception of what intelligibility is like -- in order for a thing to be knowable, it must possess self-identity and must be distinguishable from other things. Thus, according to this definition, the non-existent "one" would contain both unlikeness and likeness. Again, because of these contradictory characteristics, the one must be in a state of transition -- an undesirable conclusion, because then the one cannot be said to be entirely unified. Parmenides begins again in his consideration of a one that is not. A one that is not cannot possess being in any sense, and thus, cannot change in any sense. Because it contains being in no sense, it cannot be said to "be" anything. Thus, it has no characteristics. It cannot stand in relation to anything else, and, thus, cannot be knowable or perceivable.

Parmenides then moves to consider the implications for "others" when the one is said not to exist. The others must be different from each other, since no sense of the one (and therefore unity) can be said to exist. But, again because there is no one, they must be able to differ only in indistinguishable groups. Depending on points of perception, the others would appear both unified and different. The only things which exist would be the others, since no "one" exists. This idea, however, leads to the conclusion that there is neither a one nor a many. There is no one, so there can be no groups of ones, and thus no many. Since there
is no unity to their being, it cannot be said that they possess any characteristics, including being. Thus, in conclusion, "if there is no one, there is nothing at all" (Plato 956).

In summary, we must postulate the existence of both "oneness" and "manyness" to make the world of our experiences intelligible. By doing this, however, we are forced to paradoxical conclusions. If we start with a bias in favor of one way of looking at things, we arrive with conclusions favoring that bias. But looking at things with an opposing bias leads one to conclusions which are opposite the previous conclusions. Thus, it appears at first that the truth of a matter depends on the particular bias a thinker has when considering that matter. This assertion, however, can be summarily rejected. We must have some common ground of discussion to say anything intelligible to each other and to make sense of the world. If it were actually the case that the bias with which one considers a matter determines the conclusion reached, then it would be a mistake to suppose that we have any real conclusions. Every "conclusion" would be nothing more than a more elaborate way of stating the bias with which the thinker began. Furthermore, there are serious logical problems with asserting that every conclusion depends only on the biases that one holds when approaching a problem. The conclusion of this statement itself would have to also be subject to this claim. Thus, its own validity cannot be asserted. In other words, holding a statement such as "the truth of a matter depends on my viewpoint when approaching that matter" to be true involves one in a contradiction. If the statement is true, then its truth cannot be determined -- an extremely problematic paradox.

By the end of the dialogue, Plato seems to realize that both the unifying and differing aspects of experience are equally important. To give unity a prior place, such as Plato has previously done, leads to undesirable consequences. Instead,
unity and difference must be given equal places in a philosophical account. The identity of a substance, action, or idea depends both on its similarities to and differences from other substances, actions, or ideas. Sameness cannot be understood apart from difference, and the same holds true for difference. In the same way, a complete account of a particular experience relies not only on a description of other such experiences with which it shares commonalities, but also the ways that the experience is different, or unique.

When Plato considers the relations between the one and the many, he does so with a particular idea of intelligibility already in mind. Thus, his reflection leads him to paradoxical conclusions. Depending on the bias with which the problem is approached, Parmenides arrives at different conclusions. The dialogue, by the end, seems to offer no solution to the problem of the relation between the one and the many. It is assumed, however, that Parmenides (and Plato through him) are approaching this problem without any further biases. They do, however, have particular preconceived notions. They are guilty of possessing an approach to the epistemic concerns of the one and the many with the idea that knowledge is, like the one, utterly unified. In other words, they believe that knowledge, in all cases, pertains to exactly the same aspects of human experience. Knowledge, however, does not seem to have this character. Knowledge of a triangle is not the same thing as knowledge of a person. It is a mistake to assume that these two very different types of knowledge are the same. Plato assumes that knowledge of a particular, definite concept like that of a triangle is the same as, for instance, the knowledge of who a person is. A triangle is defined as a three-sided figure whose internal angles add up to 180 degrees and whose sides are straight line segments. Once one understands this definition, in all its constituent parts, then that person understands the concept of a triangle. This is what it means to say that one knows what a triangle is. These characteristics are what is necessary and sufficient for a
figure to be a triangle. These qualities are easily expressed and understood, and so then can a triangle be easily expressed and understood.

Knowledge of a person, however, is importantly different. When we say that we know a person, we mean many things: we can predict how that person will react in different circumstances; we understand something about that person's habits and his past; we know something of that person's outlook on the world, in the form of values and personal beliefs; we know what that person does for a living; and we can identify some of the relations that person has, whether they be family members, friends, or business acquaintances. While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, it does show something of the greater complexity of knowledge of an individual. Furthermore, it is not clear that such a list could, in principle, ever be complete. The relations in which a person stands to various other persons are constantly in a state of flux. Likewise, a person's values and place in the world continually change, even if it is only in subtle ways. Thus, even if one could spell out all answers to questions relating to a person's identity and knowledge of that person, the answers to those questions would change in such a way and with such rapidity that before any conclusion could be made, the list would be outdated and incomplete.

In fact, when I say that I know a person, I mean something quite different from just being able to elaborate the sort of characteristics described earlier. When I say that I know someone I mean that I have a certain kind of relationship with that person. This relationship allows me to identify some of the characteristics of that person such as job, relations to others, values, etc. This relationship, however, is not merely a definitive elaboration of these attributes; it is not something that can be explained with the sort of definition that a triangle possesses. A relationship of this sort must be cultivated in such a way as to preserve the particular "knowledge" of that person. Without this cultivation,
relationships among people break down, and knowledge of other people is, in an important way, lost.

Personal experiences can show how it is that people "grow apart" or "fall out of touch." Even if I know someone quite well at the present moment, I will not necessarily continue to know them in the future (or at least not in the same way). Take, for instance, the case of two friends who know each other quite well while living in one location. They may share the same sort of interests, know many of the same people, and frequent the same places. Sam (friend #1) knows Sally (friend #2) -- he knows that she loves biology, jazz, and Impressionism; he understands that she has had particular problems in her past that continue to cause her problems; he knows that she hates chocolate ice cream, that her parents are divorced, and so on. Now, consider what might happen if Sally moves away and these two friends fall out of touch. They might communicate for a short time, but eventually, they both fail to write or call with much frequency, and, suddenly, it has been a few years since they have spoken. After a five year absence of communication, these two friends accidentally once again meet. They may or may not instantly recognize each other, but when they do discover each other again can it be said that they still know each other? Sally still hates chocolate ice cream, and continues to really like jazz. But she has formed her interest in biology into an M.D., and has gotten married. She has learned ways to cope with some of the problems from her past, and in many ways seems to be a different person. She and Sam may have a very nice visit together and may even again become acquaintances. Nevertheless, even if they once again become good friends, they do not have exactly the same sort of relationship because they have lost the important knowledge of each other that they once possessed.

Thus, even if these two friends once again grow close and develop a knowledge of each other, there was a time where they did not possess knowledge
of one another. They had to work to get to know each other again. This new knowledge is not the same as the old knowledge. It is not the same sort of thing as relearning what a triangle is. If you forget that a triangle has three sides, the definition of a triangle can easily be reacquired. In this way, the knower of the triangle once again possesses the same knowledge that he or she had to begin with. This is not the case with knowledge of a human being. In fact, even if one does not lose communication with a person, the knowledge of that person is not the same from day to day just as that person is not the same from day to day. Characteristics, such as relationships sustained, knowledge and views possessed, and socioeconomic status are continually in a state of flux, or at least possess a great potential for change. Since at least part of a person's identity is made up of these changing attributes, to know a person must mean that at least part of this knowledge alters. Thus, knowledge of this sort is not constant, or unchanging, unlike knowledge of the triangle.

A defender of Plato's view of the unity of knowledge would like to say that there is something essential about a person that can be known in a stable and unchanging way. Thus, when I think that I am the same person from this week to the next, there is some unifying aspect to my identity, I am not making a mistake. In other words, what Platonists mean when they say they know a person is that they know the essential characteristics of that person. Other facts about his movement within the world may change, but that essential something maintains a stable character and this essence can be understood. Upon understanding this essence, a person is known. It is hard to explain, however, what this essence would consist of. It surely is not something so mundane as a name, for this is alterable -- not only in a legal sense, but also people pick up and drop nicknames, titles, and honorifics throughout their lives. Relationships to people change. Being someone's brother or someone's mother, for instance, is of lesser or greater
importance to that person's identity depending on how that role is adopted. People are capable of losing touch with people to such a degree that mere biological relations become unimportant when considering what is essential to that person.

We do, however, seem to have an uncanny ability to recognize people from great distances, even after long periods of separation. One can alter his or her physical appearance to a great degree, but continue to trigger some recognition by his or her bearing or countenance. It seems that perhaps we do recognize something essential about an identity. We converse with people on a daily basis, apparently behaving as people are importantly the same from day to day. We think of ourselves as changing, but nevertheless static. Our relationships can change quite rapidly and, even when they slowly evolve, they still change in important ways. Thus, it seems that our own personalities have a character of stability as well as change, a character of unity as well as difference. Thus, when I say that I know a person I do not mean merely that I understand those things that are stable in a person, I mean that I am in a relationship such that the differences under which that person exists are known to me. Thus, a broader conception of knowledge is necessary to understanding what it means to possess comprehension of many of the fundamental aspects of our experiences in the world. Our idea of knowledge must encompass stability and change, as well as unity and difference in order for it to be a complete and useful account.
In *The Principles of Psychology*, William James discusses the nature of personal identity, beginning with an elaboration of the parts that make up the self. He breaks these parts into four categories: the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego. The material self is the physical body, clothes, family, home, and property. The social self is made up of relations to other people. As James states, "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him" (85). The social self also includes one's fame and honor, as well as occupation. The spiritual self is the psychic being of an individual -- moral sensibilities, the will, ideas, and capacity for emotions. All of these selves, as James describes, can change to greater or lesser degrees. James describes the spiritual self as the most lasting and most resilient to change, followed by the social and material aspects. When something of the spiritual self changes, we sense this change as a deep and fundamental one. Nevertheless, the first three aspects of self are alterable and seem to change continually. We do, however, also seem to have a unifying part of our being. To account for this, James introduces the idea of the pure ego, or the "self of selves" (James 91).

It is this "self of selves" that one believes to be his or her *true* self, the part that does not change. It is the part that "goes out to meet . . . whatever qualities a man's feelings may possess, or whatever content his thought may include" (James 88). This description, however, does not answer the question of exactly what kind of ontological being the pure ego is, whether it is a spiritual substance or an illusory construction of the mind. What James is asking here is whether there is any real sense in saying that a person is separable from the temporary relations he or she has to the rest of the world. Is there some being who holds these relations
or is our sense of a stable identity merely an illusion rising out of these prior relations? James states that we at least feel some sense of this central ego: "It is something with which we also have direct sensible acquaintance, and which is as fully present at any moment of consciousness in which it is present, as in a whole lifetime of moments" (89). Nevertheless, sensing that something is there is not the same thing as expressing what that something is. James then goes on to explore what he thinks of himself as a way of attempting to pin down exactly what this central self is -- to learn whether or not we are fooling ourselves when we believe that we have some central core of our being.

In the end, James rejects the idea of a true "self of selves." He states that we are mistaken if we think that there is some being prior to the relations he or she holds to other beings. Rather, it is the false sense of a unitary being that arises from the relations. When reflecting in only a general sense James sees that it is sensible to suppose that we have some central core to our being. However, when he tries to pin down exactly what that core is, he is frustrated. He states that it is hard for him to detect any purely spiritual aspect to his being. He is unable to separate "himself" (as a pure ego) from the physiological actions that take place when he undergoes moments of reflection: "the 'self of selves,' when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of particular motions in the head or between the head and throat." (James 91-2). In this picture, the stability of self we seem to possess is merely the result of certain physical, bodily processes. James is frustrated by his attempts to find a central, spiritual core to his being, and in the end arrives at some very counter-intuitive claims regarding the nature of the self.

James's conclusions are derived, in large part, from his ideas regarding the nature of thought. James, in fact, sounds much like Plato in his discussion of thinking. He says that the "bringing of things together into the objects of a single
judgment is of course essential to all thinking" (James 100) and the "sense of sameness is the very keel and backbone of our thinking" (James 110). James says we have perceptions of identity because in order to think we must notice similarities. Thus, we think of ourselves as unified and the same from day to day, experience to experience only because we are predisposed to recognize sameness more than difference. There is, in this picture, nothing peculiar about a self except the particular relations held and current, temporary states of mind. In principle, then, nothing differentiates one individual from another because one could stand (in principle, though this may not be practically possible) in the same relations as another. Therefore, we are different only because of different relations held. We have a sense of self-identity and recognize stability of identity in others only because we are normally given to perceiving unities, rather than differences. We wish to think of our identities as stable, so we pay attention only to those aspects of our experience that lead to this conclusion.

James once again sounds like Plato when he says, "Any fact, be it thing, event, or quality, may be conceived sufficiently for purposes of identification, if only it be singled out and marked so as to separate it from other things" (James 112). We produce the myth that individuals have self-identity in the same fashion that we believe one individual to be essentially differentiated from all others. In James, the individual is no more than the sum of relations held. Similarity (within the individual) and difference (between individuals) are paid attention to only for practical purposes -- we need them in order to function in the world. They are helpful human creations, but no more. On this picture, independent of our relations, we are nothing. Some relations may be more important than others -- for instance, my relation to my car has less to do with defining who I am than do my relations to friends and family. Nevertheless, all of these relations are subject to
change, and when these changes occur, I am in an essential way (at least according to James).

The crucial, and ultimately problematic, point in James's argument comes when he explores his own nature, when he tries to look for some spiritual, unchanging core to his being. He says that all that appears to him is just the physical body and its influences on his thoughts, and so he gives up his search, declaring that the self is a mere fabrication. James looks within himself and sees only a collection of chemicals and nerve firings. His relations are what defines him as an individual. Nevertheless, there is in fact something doing the searching, something that gets frustrated and surrenders. When trying to isolate what it is that separates us from our relations, we become easily confused. Intuitively, I want to claim that I am an individual -- both in the sense that I am separable and distinct from others and also in the sense that I maintain something of a stable "self of selves" throughout all the changes undergone in my relations. Beyond the intuition, however, I am hard-pressed to say exactly what this identity is.

Perhaps the difficulty is that the "pure ego" is what is doing the searching, and thus it is, in a real sense, trying to find itself. The impossibility is akin to that of one trying to look at one's own eyes. The eye is the tool of perception and thus can never see itself. In like fashion, it is impossible to look for one's individuality with the aspect of one's self that individuates. We are frustrated in our attempts to locate a core of being not because it does not exist but because we are attempting to perceive it in the wrong way. We are trying to look within with that part of us that is already "within." Perhaps a better tactic would be to look without. In the same fashion that I intuitively sense myself to be an individual, I also have little doubt, intuitively, that there are other individuals beyond me. Even though I cannot pin down exactly who I am in an essential way, I can at least recognize individuality in others. One defines himself or herself by relations held not only
for the practical reasons James describes but also because it is these relations that help us to see who we ourselves are. The individuality I recognize in others allows me to understand where I (as an individual) am similar or different from them. In other words, I cannot see my own eyes, but I can see others'.

Even though we often identify ourselves through our relations to others, these relations are not all that there is to our identity. This identity cannot be pinned down, but it nevertheless exists. We experience evidence of individuality through our relationships to others. Through others, we recognize something individual within ourselves. We can mark out similarities and differences -- perhaps I have had similar experiences as another person, but arrive at different conclusions as to their meaning or significance. It is important to note that we "bump into" other individuals in the world -- we recognize these others to be not just someone to whom we have relations but that they are full individuals that exist beyond these relations. Through this recognition, we do not only learn something about these others, but also about ourselves -- we affirm our own individuality by recognizing it in others.

When making claims regarding the nature of individuality, the skeptic immediately wants to ask, "Exactly how do I know that individuality exists? In fact, how do I know that I am an individual?" The answers to such questions are not immediately apparent. When one tries to explain exactly who an individual is, he or she most often begins by describing, in concrete terms, relations to other individuals -- "I am the mother of..., a student of..., an employee of..., etc." When pressed further to describe exactly who it is that is holding these relations, one becomes easily confounded. It appears that perhaps the individual is no more that the nexus point in a complicated web of relations. Thus, as the relations change, so does the nexus point. In other words, the essence of one's identity changes as often as do one's relations. Immediately, however, there appear to be problems
with this model -- it conflicts directly with our experiences. I do not feel that I am fundamentally different from one day to the next. Why do we have this feeling that some stable unity exists? Perhaps the "web of relations" model is not the most accurate picture to be used. Nevertheless, one confronts a very difficult problem when trying to isolate some sort of essence at the meeting point of relationships.

It is interesting that just as William James is writing about the nature of the self, so is his brother, Henry James. William concludes that the self is an illusion, a fictive creation. The belief people have in the existence of selves is, to William, a mistake. William is writing what is traditionally considered philosophy while his brother Henry is engaged in the creation of short stories and novels. While William is arguing that the self is a fiction, Henry is creating selves in fiction. William elaborates extremely strong (though counter-intuitive) reasons for believing that the self does not exist, in any stable and knowable sense. Nevertheless, Henry's writings seem to proclaim the opposite. In the space of just a few pages, Henry creates rich characters, that are quite capable of being known. William cannot seem to isolate what it would mean to know a self because he presupposes a particular notion of knowledge. Henry, on the other hand, does not carry this presupposition. He does not directly and discursively address the nature of knowledge of the individual. Henry, instead, describes individuals richly and sufficiently and thus shows (self-consciously or not) that the possibility of knowing the individual must exist because we do in fact know selves -- such as the characters in his works.

Importantly, we do not have to know much about characters in fictional works to say that we know those characters. This knowledge of the characters in not necessarily incremental. Knowing things about people helps us to understand and to come to know a person, but this knowing about is not same experience as knowing. It seems to be a fairly common experience that we know a lot about a
person without genuinely knowing that person. Getting to know things about a
person is the process by which one gets to know a person, but this process is not
an incremental one. There is not a formula whereby once one knows a certain
number of things about a person then that individual becomes known. Instead,
there seems to be a leap between types of knowledge. William James tries to
elaborate the number of things that one might be able to know about a person, but
when finished is unable to point to some essential self about which someone might
know all of these characteristics. Henry, on the other hand, does not talk about
relationships in general. He, instead, describes very elaborate and particular
relationships and the individuals holding them. It is this act of richly describing
specific relationships that gives the reader the ability to see individuality in the
beings described. Henry is not solely responsible for creating the individuals, and
neither is the reader. It is also not the words on the pages that alone create
characters. These factors, acting together, give rise to the particular individuals
seen in his writings. In a sense, the reader posits the individuality of the characters
in stories, but this positing is not an isolated event -- it is prompted by the writing
itself. Thus, in this coming together of work, writer, and reader a jump from
knowing about characters to genuinely knowing selves occurs.

In The Principles of Psychology, William James concludes that there is no
essential, unchanging self. The self, instead, is made up essentially of relations
and thoughts about those relations. These relations and thoughts are, of course,
subject to constant change. One makes a mistake, according to William James,
when one supposes that there is some lasting character about individuals that does
not undergo the changes inherent to relations to others. The "pure ego," as it is
referred to in the Principles, is a mistake and an illusion. To describe the final and
total essence of a person, according to James, is to fully list all of the categories to
which that person belongs. Thus, to know an individual cannot mean that one
must know all of the categories to which one belongs. If this were the case, then knowledge of another (or, for that matter, knowledge of one's self) would be impossible given the indefinitely large number of relations and categories that could be described. To account for the possibility of knowledge of others within William James's picture, there must be some quantitative amount of these categories that must be known for the individual to be said to be known. To explore and critique this assertion, I will examine one of the characters from Henry James's "The Tree of Knowledge."

Peter Brench is a central character in this story, and by the end of "The Tree of Knowledge," the reader can see a certain sense of a fullness and richness to this character. Peter is not merely a stereotype or a stock character -- he is what would be referred to as a "round," rather than a "flat," character. What does it mean to say this about Peter? On the reading of individuality by William James, it means that Peter has fit into a sufficient number of categories for him to come to life as a full individual. Thus, within the story, there must be explicitly or implicitly a sufficient description of Peter's categorial labels to cause his individuality to come to be perceived by the reader. Additionally, it is precisely these categories and only these categories that would, in an essential way, be Peter. On William James's account of individuality, all of Peter should be contained by the descriptions in the text of the story.

I will use William James's description of the individual in an attempt to describe Peter's "self of selves" -- the first aspect of which is the material self. The material self is the physical body, clothes, family, home, and property of Peter Brench. Peter's physical body is described as "massive," "mild," "large and loose and ruddy and curly, with deep tones," and "deep eyes." His apparel is said to consist of "soft hats and brownish, greyish, weather-faded clothes, apparently always the same" (Angus 39) All of these terms help to describe the physical
appearance of Peter, but one could easily imagine another person matching such a description. Peter does not have a family per se, at least not in the sense that William James means. Peter's home is a small villa with books, prints, servants, and new improvements. Additionally, Peter is described as being independently wealthy. All of these descriptions bring forth a particular picture of Peter but they do not get at his internal thoughts and feelings, nor do they describe his relations to others.

The second aspect of the self for William James is the social self. This social self is most importantly the relations held to other persons, along with one's occupation, and social station. Nothing is said of Peter's social station or occupation. The only thing that is made clear is that Peter spends most of every day lounging. Thus, he has much time to cultivate and contemplate his social relations. The only social relations that are described are those to the other three main characters -- the Master, Mrs. Mallow, and Lancelot. Peter is a friend of Mr. Mallow (the Master) and is said to be quite fond of him. Peter is secretly in love with Mrs. Mallow, but the precise nature of his adoration is unclear. He is Lancelot's godfather and seems to quite fond of Lance as well, acting as a father-figure to him. These social relations put the four characters together into a family of sorts. The bonds among them are important to defining who each one is, but they do not encompass the totality of the individual identities in the relationships. These social descriptions of Peter are more specific than the material descriptions mentioned earlier. It is somewhat harder to imagine someone else holding these same relations, but it is not impossible that someone else could be a friend of Mr. Mallow, an admirer of Mrs. Mallow, and a godfather to Lancelot. In other words, these relations, even when coupled with the earlier material descriptions, do not completely capture the character of Peter Brench.
William James's third aspect of the self is the spiritual self. The spiritual self consists, at least in part, of one's moral sensibilities, ideas, and capacities for emotions. Peter believes that it is important to not let his true feelings be known if those feelings might hurt others. He does not lie, but he does not tell the complete truth on matters -- he merely avoids making comment. Specifically, he does not make known his true feelings for Mrs. Mallow, and he also hides his true opinion of the Master's work. Furthermore, Peter considers himself to be a success for not being an artist like the Master. Additionally, Peter also does not like to travel. His capacity for emotions include his love for Mrs. Mallow and his concern for the Master and Lancelot. He also greatly fears the possibility of Mrs. Mallow's discovering his true feelings for her. These spiritual aspects of Peter are tied up intimately with his social relations. In fact, it is not clear at all how one might be able to separate the two aspects of self. Perhaps the best description would be that the spiritual parts of the self seem to be an elaboration of how Peter himself feels about the social relations he holds. These spiritual aspects, however, are still in principle ones that could be ascribed to another person. All of these descriptions of Peter, from the material to the social to the spiritual, are merely categories to which someone might belong. William James concludes that to fit into these categories is the total of the nature of the individual. To look for a "self of selves" is futile. The self, or pure ego, dissolves away into these described relations and the categorial ways one might react to or feel about such relations.

The conclusions in The Principles of Psychology, however, are sound only if these categories fully capture the essence of Peter Brench. It is not clear, however, that this is the case. Much of Peter seems to exist beyond the actual text of the story. Aspects of Peter's personality are not explicitly stated in the text, but the reader nevertheless understands them anyway. Peter seems to believe that one must use reason to control passions. Otherwise, passions might swell out of
control to destroy people and their relations. Nevertheless, Peter himself seems to have a great deal of passion, especially that directed toward Mrs. Mallow. He is devoted to her to such a degree that he has stayed unmarried so that he might be able to more fully enjoy his desire for her. Peter possesses a certain inertia, a strong resistance to change and a desire to have a sense of comfort in his life. He seems to love predictability. Furthermore, by the end of the story, it seems that Peter has a sense of helplessness about him. He has tried to do what he can to prevent Lancelot from learning about his father's lack of talent, but this act is futile. Also, he learns that his attempts to be close to Mrs. Mallow have been useless because she is devoted to her husband in a way that Peter cannot sunder--she is in love with the Master, not his work.

There seems to be something about Peter not fully captured by the categories of William James. The categories describe Peter to an extent, but knowledge of these categories is not the same thing as knowledge of Peter. These categories describe knowledge about Peter, but they do not describe knowledge of Peter. There is something going on here that cannot be fully captured by a description or listing of categories known. There is a qualitative shift in the nature of knowledge regarding the character of Peter Brench. It is interesting to note the difference in the ways that Peter is seen on a first reading of the story and on subsequent readings. On the first reading of "The Tree of Knowledge," the reader is learning specific things about Peter -- categories to which Peter belongs. In subsequent readings, however, after Peter himself is known (not just known about), the reader has a different perception of the incidents in the story. There is a greater understanding of Peter because one is able to interpret the categorical descriptions in light of the now-acquired knowledge of Peter. This knowledge is not a knowledge of the categorical descriptions. That knowledge is acquired in a first reading of the story. It is a new quality, not just a greater quantity, of
knowledge. An interesting phenomenon that accompanies this new knowledge is the fact that one finds it difficult on further readings to separate specific statements in the text from the underlying facts about Peter that such statements manifest. An example of this is the conversation between Peter and Mrs. Mallow at the end of the first section. Peter wants to deny the importance of the passion for painting that Lance possesses. A deeper understanding of Peter indicates that it is not merely Lance's pursuit of painting that Peter is arguing against. Peter must also be wrestling internally with his desire to control his own passion for Mrs. Mallow. She denies that Peter even understands what passion is, when he is ironically in a constant struggle to maintain the dominance of reason over passion within his own character. None of these internal workings, however, are made clear in the text.

There is a certain leap into being of Peter for the reader. Knowing Peter is not merely the knowing of a number of things about Peter. By the end of the story, radical changes have happened to the way that Peter thinks about his relations to others -- he and Lance share a secret knowledge, Peter realizes that Mrs. Mallow will never grow to love him, and Peter's opinions regarding the Master's work have been confirmed by the other characters. In the simple sort of life that Peter leads, his whole world has been altered. Nevertheless, it seems that Peter is still Peter, even after having undergone these changes. Once having acquired genuine knowledge of Peter, the reader can go back to the text again and see Peter himself (and not just a character being described) in the categorical terms of the text. In a real sense, it is true that there is an individual within the words of the story. Peter comes into being as a self not because of the number of categories described, but because there is some relation forged between the character and the reader. Peter becomes more than just the descriptions on the page and more than just a sum of his relations to others. The reader is able to see Peter as a self because Peter shares something of the nature of the reader's self. Perhaps it is his
sense of helplessness, or maybe his desire to not hurt anyone (even if doing so hurts himself), but something within the text draws on the reader to see Peter as a self. The reader can "identify with" Peter because Peter is, like the reader, an individual. There is some connection formed that causes the reader not only to see Peter for who he is, but it also causes the reader to see himself or herself in the light of Peter's own individuality.

It is not necessary that an observer would have to find something admirable with which to identify in another. It seems quite likely that one could see something despicable within another, and this recognition could cause a sort of self-examination of self and one's own flaws. This sort of mirror is caused by the real presence of a self in another. This recognition of another self is a knowledge of both similarities and differences -- knowledge of how one might be similar to another as well as knowledge of how one might differ. This recognition is a kind of knowing that is different from what is customarily meant by knowledge -- the sort of categorical, stable, definite drawing together of experiences. This knowledge of the individual depends on both similarity and difference, a recognition of both unity and plurality. Henry James, in this sense, already knows Peter when he is composing "The Tree of Knowledge." The description of Peter in the text is a set of pictures of parts of him, but the final list of these descriptions is not all that there is to Peter. One understands Peter in a different way by reading "The Tree of Knowledge" than one would by merely reading William James's categories for Peter. This difference of understanding indicates that something more exists of the individual than that which can be captured by the recitation of a list of relations and categories.
William James, psychologist and philosopher, and Henry James, artist, both seem to be in many ways interested in the same kinds of questions. In a broad sense, they are both exploring issues regarding the nature of individuality. Henry creates individual characters in stories, such as Peter in "The Tree of Knowledge," whereas William is trying to decide exactly what the nature of the individual is. In *The Principles of Psychology*, William reaches some rather unsatisfactory and counter-intuitive conclusions regarding the individual. These conclusions are unsatisfactory specifically because they ignore some very common human experiences and fly in the face of the *fact* of Henry's work. We seem to be able to recognize individuality in people and Henry seems to be creating individuals in his work. Why then does William arrive at these conclusions? Where is the source of this dissolving of the individual into relations and categories? It seems that William is making certain assumptions about the nature of being and knowledge. Implicit in the *Principles* is the idea that for something to exist it must be capturable in categorial terms. William James is looking for types, not for instances. His conception of intelligibility and existence presupposes that for something to exist *means* that it must be able to be described in categories and universal terms. James's assumptions, however, are not uncommon. The Western tradition has been largely obsessed with similarity at the expense of difference. Thus, when William looks for individuality he is frustrated because he looks with eyes that perceive only similarity. An individual is, by definition, essentially different from anything else (including other individuals). Our descriptive, discursive terms, however, are concerned with drawing things into relations of
similarity -- with the putting of things into categories. Thus, when William examines the individual it is not surprising that he finds only a list of categories. Because of his assumptions regarding the nature of being, he finds only these categories. Thus, the individual, for William James, becomes only a peculiar instance of these categories. Nothing individuates a person because it would be possible, in principle, to have another person standing in the same relations and belonging to the same categories.

We do not, however, have to adopt the assumptions of William James. His brother Henry does not. Henry begins with the idea that individuals must exist, and they must exist essentially as something more than mere instances of categories. Something beyond these descriptions is there. When Henry presents Peter to us, he is describing an individual. The descriptions in the text of the story, however, are not synonymous with the individual. All that is within the actual words of the text is categorial description. Once these descriptions are explored, it can be understood that, while they are complex and important keys to understanding Peter, they (taken collectively) are not the same thing as Peter. The categorial descriptions of an individual are, instead, manifestations of the individual. Even though such descriptions help us to understand who an individual is, they are not the same (ontologically) as that individual. These descriptions can and do change. Descriptions of an individual manifest themselves in different ways but do still indicate the same person. The categorial nature of the individual is what we can describe and communicate. We can argue about and classify such descriptions. Therefore, we are naturally drawn to paying attention to these manifestations rather than the individual behind the external displays, a subject that is much harder to discuss.

To understand Henry James's Peter, we do more than just understand the descriptions of him. We get behind these appearances and discover the person
who is presenting himself to the world in this way. Likewise, there is something more to knowing people of our daily acquaintance than merely "knowing about" them. We can see what makes them who they are only as we get to know them. Manifestations of the individual help to indicate who that individual is, but they are not a complete account. Something is always lacking. These descriptions mark off certain boundaries and point in a general direction, but there is always an inadequacy of categorial descriptions. These assertions can be more clearly understood in the light of a particular case -- characters in literature.

Thinking about novels and stories read, I can clearly pick out some characters who have truly "leapt to life" for me. What is it that unites these characters? What part of the work causes them to come into being for me in such a way? I think that it is the nature of their descriptions. The individual is not the same thing as his or her descriptions, but these manifestations point to the individual I am trying to know. When characters are left rather flat, they do not seem to come to life. If they are described in terms of stereotypes or as just instances of a particular group of people, I am not convinced that they are genuine individuals -- these characters are too simple to be real. On the other hand, characters are sometimes described so idiosyncratically that they are unbelievable as persons. They do not leap into being as individuals because they disappear in the overwhelming amount of descriptive labels attached to them. They are ascribed so many characteristics that it does not seem possible that such a person could exist -- these characters are too complex to be real. In both of these types of character descriptions, an individual does not come into being. In the first case, there are not enough manifestations to give the reader any understanding of the individual -- this would be akin to something like knowing only someone's name, occupation, and date of birth. We do not have enough information, or at least we do not have the right kind of information to genuinely perceive the person. In the
second case, the individual cannot be known because he or she is lost in the overabundance of descriptions. These descriptions may even be somewhat at odds. These people are so eccentric and have so many different manifestations that the reader has a hard time trying to affix all of these descriptions to the same person. Thus, in literature, we know the characters as individuals only when these two extremes are avoided. The right kind of manifestations of personality must be present for one to be able to make the leap necessary to possessing a direct knowledge of the individual.

At a certain introductory point, we know another person only through particular expressions. Later, however, the individual behind these manifestations becomes apparent and we, in a full sense, know him or her. Let me describe a specific case, understanding that any such description will be necessarily inadequate. What I say, however, helps to point to what I mean -- the difficulty of describing the individual experience of experiencing an individual. To genuinely understand what it means to know an individual, one must have his or her own direct experiences, be they through social relations, or art. I am a resident advisor in the dorm that I live in. As such, it is my responsibility to "get to know" all of the fifty-nine residents on my floor. The first few steps in this task are things like having socials where people mingle, having a floor meeting where I can introduce myself, and making sure that I know everyone's name. Looking back on the day of move-in, I cannot remember meeting any individuals. What I mean is that all I was doing was handing out information and keys to people whose only relation to me was their being instances of the category "people I am responsible for." I concentrated solely on trying to remember what rooms they would be in and trying to put names with faces. I certainly met all of my residents within the first week because they had to come to me in order to get access cards for the building. I do not, however, remember meeting any of them, in a genuine sense. Each individual
on the floor has, throughout the course of the semester, leapt into being for me. I can now safely say that I know everyone on the floor. I do not just know about them. The task of linking together such things as room numbers, names, and faces was a step in getting to know these persons, but the knowing of these things is not the same thing as knowing these individuals. I knew these facts about these persons before I knew the individuals. I cannot remember my residents from the first day because they did not exist, as such, in my understanding of them. Instead of individuals, I was meeting and learning things about instances of categories. This step, however, is necessary. Before one can see what lies behind manifestations, one must first see only the manifestations. Learning what separates one person from another is one aspect of the coming to know of a person, rather than just to know about that person. My residents still fit within the categories I had labeled them with in the first week, but now each one is something more than those categories or any more information I have learned about them (collectively or individually).

This knowledge of the individual as such has profound moral implications. Iris Murdoch, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, discusses exactly these issues. It is the coming to know a person as an individual and not as an instance of a category that allows us to behave properly toward that person. Murdoch says that "love is knowledge of the individual" (Murdoch 28). It is a moral action (both rational and emotional) that propels us to come to understand others as equals to ourselves. Just as I am more than just the manifestations I present to the world, so are others. When I recognize this fact and behave accordingly I am acting in a virtuous manner. The moral virtuousness or viscousness of a decision takes place within the individual because it is there that he or she can understand and come to know others. We do not need to find universal laws of action to define ethics. Instead, one should see others with a sense of mercy and justice. We make a decision
internally on how to treat others; the outward effects are only displays of this internal state of mind. It is hard to discuss the nature of moral decisions because to do so would be to talk in universal terms. No scientific or philosophical set of terms will adequately capture the essence of that which is internal to the individual. Thus, Murdoch says, "nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous" (Murdoch 87). It is in the internal frame of mind, rather than in the external results of actions that morality is located.

Our morality is affected by what we pay attention to. If we see only the manifestations of the individual and never look beyond them to see the self being expressed, we will not be able to treat that person with the respect deserved. Classic examples of this sort of treatment are obvious -- such things as racism and sexism. Here the individual is being seen as one of a type, as if these characteristics (race or sex) are the essence and most important aspect of who that person is. Thinking of persons as groups of categories and relations can easily lead to this kind of treatment. If I am merely the relations I hold, then someone could be justified in treating me (or thinking about me) as just a peculiar instance of a category. If there is not a recognition of the person as an individual, then there really is nothing to respect. Why would one feel compelled to respect a list of categories? Just as the perceiving person feels himself or herself to be a stable unitary self, so should the perceived person be treated and considered. One should understand that others are to be thought of as individuals.

Murdoch makes two statements that express this central moral idea: "Anything that alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity, and realism is to be connected with virtue" (Murdoch 84) and "Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of virtuous consciousness" (Murdoch 93). To be moral means to escape the selfish concerns of our own individuality. When I consider my own
self to be more important than another's I am acting immorally. When I, on the other hand, forget myself and act for the betterment of another I am acting in a virtuous fashion. If one were to consider those frames of mind that are normally considered immoral, one would find a unified habit of ignoring the fact that behind every manifestation lies an individual. Prejudice, for instance, results from taking a person to be *most essentially* a member of a specific group, as if that group-membership were what defined that individual in an essential way. People treat each other poorly on a personal level when that person ceases to be an individual with his or her own thoughts and concerns and instead becomes merely an obstacle to be overcome or a problem to be solved. We treat someone immorally when we stop thinking of them as another like ourselves and begin to think of them as mere phenomena -- objects in our perception that merely help or harm our ability to behave as we choose. To take a more objective, unselfish view is what it means to be moral. When we stop seeing things from only our own perspectives and realize that there are others affected by our decisions, we are on the proper course.

Thus, to behave morally is to simultaneously recognize similarity and difference. We are to recognize that there are others who are, in an important sense, much like us who ought to be treated as such. At the same time, we are to recognize the complicated nature of any moral decision and understand that there are many viewpoints that could be taken in the understanding of what one ought to do. We are to free ourselves from our selfish concerns and see the complexity involved in moral decision making. To raise ourselves up beyond the specific concerns of our selfish desires is to see what unites us as individuals. Paradoxically, we are alike as individuals because we each are fundamentally unlike anyone else. The manifestations we present to the external world help to indicate us, but they are not the same as us. When one remembers that this is the
case, he or she is on the proper road to an understanding of human moral interactions.

The recognition of another person as an individual is the first step in the pursuit of a moral character. Quite often we tend to see others as only the manifestations with which we are confronted, but this is a mistake. It is quite easy to see only a relation rather than questioning what (or who) it is that is standing in that relation. Seeing, instead, that there are persons in our experience who are every bit as much individuals as we are is the key to morality. Morality is grounded in the seeing of others as individuals, and not as instances of categories, or merely objects of perception. The unselfish act of separating oneself from personal concerns is what is necessary to be committing a worthy moral act. Notice here that I am using the word "act." I mean that there is an action, but it need not be an external one. Murdoch describes this sort of moral action, or form of seeing as requiring "moral imagination and moral effort" (Murdoch 37). Murdoch describes an idea that I wish to defend -- the notion that a moral action is an internal event and that such an event may or may not have external consequences. The consequences, however, are not what is moral about an event. They are, instead, outward manifestations of the internal event, in a sense similar to the external categorial descriptions presented to the world by the individual.

Iris Murdoch discusses in The Sovereignty of Good a particular case of this sort of moral action -- an action with no external manifestations that is nevertheless good. This case and discussion is presented on pages 17 to 23. Murdoch talks about a mother (M) who does not care for her daughter-in-law (D). M considers D to be a "silly vulgar girl." It is not that M does not consider D to be a good person on some level. She merely thinks that her son did not marry the best sort of girl that he could have. Notice here that M is thinking of D in terms of categories -- "the best sort of girl." D, for M, is merely an instance of a category
something like, "people my so could have married." D could have been a member of a better class of people. Her manifestations in the world could have been more socially acceptable. It is said that M thinks of D as "good-hearted," but that otherwise she considers D to be "tiresomely juvenile." Because M is thinking of D only as a sort of unfulfilled potential, as a person not quite good enough for her son, she is not perceiving D morally. Seeing D as only those qualities which she exhibits to others is to make a mistake regarding the nature of D. M is not looking beyond the manifestations to see the individual being manifested. She is, instead, only seeing D as those qualities which D possesses. M is making a mistake in thinking that D is only the sum of the characteristics she manifests. Thus, M can see only aspects that D lacks, as well as qualities such as being "brusque" and "vulgar." Importantly, however, M is the sort of person who is not willing to exhibit her true feelings regarding someone. For precisely the reasons that she does not like D, M hides her feelings. M does not want to be the sort of "vulgar" person that she perceives D to be. Thus, D is not aware of M's feelings regarding her. M has been quite congenial to her throughout their acquaintance, and D has remained ignorant of her mother-in-law's feelings. Thus, there is no outward manifestation of M's internal feelings.

As Murdoch continues the story, M thinks reflectively about her feelings for D. She thinks that perhaps she has misjudged the girl. Importantly, what allows M to undertake such a reevaluation of D is that she is paying attention to her own feelings and thinking about them reflectively. M is not satisfied (at least not for long) with the feelings she initially had regarding D. She wants to question her assumptions and thoughts regarding the situation. She is striving to be better, in a significant way. She has not, however, undertaken any sort of external action at this point. She merely wants to rethink what she had previously concluded. After a self-evaluation of this kind M decides that D is not as she has previously
considered her. D has a life and vitality that M had previously missed in her perceptions, perhaps out of jealousy -- jealously possibly stemming from D's youth or perhaps D's close relationship to M's son. D is now, for M, enthusiastic, interesting, and exciting. It is now a joy for M to be around D. M, however, does not act any differently around D. She, instead, thinks of D differently, in a new light. M conceives of or sees D in a different way. What makes this new perception of D an improvement? What about this reconception means that M has performed in a morally good fashion? In other words, why is this new view not merely different, rather than better?

It could be said that M's new view of D is no different, in an essential way, from her previous conception. Instead of paying attention to D as "juvenile," she now regards D as "youthful." Both of these terms, however, are categorial descriptions. What makes one better than the other? Two intimately related internal actions make M's new understanding better than her old. First of all, M recognized a fault within herself in her thoughts regarding D. M says to herself that she is perhaps "old-fashioned," "prejudiced," "snobbish," and "certainly jealous." M knows her own selfish view to be biased. Her initial reaction to D was as it was because she viewed D through her own preconceived notions of what it means to be a likeable person. Recognizing (though not necessarily fully escaping these notions) is a first step in paying attention to what it is that one ought to do. The second part to such a moral action is M's attempt not only to escape her earlier notions, but also to try to see things from another's perspective. She might understand that her son is a reasonable person and must love his wife for good reasons. Also, M might see the joy that D seems to possess and seek to understand why it is that D sees the world this way. An understanding of D's enthusiastic outlook could mean that M adopts a new, more enjoyable attitude regarding her own life. M is escaping her selfish picture of the world. She is
recognizing in both of these parts of her moral action that there are other individuals in the world who are important to consider. She is looking beyond the manifestations to see the being manifested, or at least she takes for granted that such an individual exists and is important to consider and to pay attention to.

The moral content of M's action is that she is escaping her selfish view of the world and attempting to see the world as it really is -- she is trying to understand people and the world without prejudice. It is not necessary that she produce some external manifestation of this new understanding in order to make her action moral. It is moral because she is viewing D as an individual, not selfishly as a list of categories that affect herself. M may not be able to do this entirely -- a totally objective view seems to be an extremely lofty goal. The attempt itself, however, is significant. M is willing to reconsider her privately held notions and set them up to be challenged by the fact that she may be wrong. This internal act is one of self-sacrifice made in an attempt to understand others and treat them as they really are. What I mean by "as they really are" is a freedom from immediate, selfish concerns -- an attempt to see things as others see them, especially the person being considered. Moral actions, such as M's reconsideration of D, are moral not because of the external effects of the action. Instead, the action is internal to M's perceptions of the world -- especially as those perceptions include other individuals, such as D. Perhaps another example would help to clarify these points.

Think again of "The Tree of Knowledge." In the light of the foregoing analysis, it can be seen that Peter acts in both morally virtuous and morally vicious fashions. A vicious moment for Peter is when he thinks of Lancelot without giving full attention to Lance as a self. Peter does not want Lance to study art because he is afraid that Lance will learn that his father is untalented. Thus, Lance might upset the balance Peter strives to maintain. Peter is afraid that if Lance tells his
mother what he has learned that Mrs. Mallow might leave, taking Lance (but not Peter) with her. Thus, Peter does all that he can to prevent Lance from attending art school, including offering to pay for Lance to go to Cambridge. Peter is not paying attention to Lance as a full individual. Instead, Peter is thinking about Lance as merely an object for his own manipulation. Peter is behaving viciously through his internal actions, not the external results. If he had been offering to pay for Lance to go to Cambridge for other reasons, then he might have been acting virtuously. Peter, however, was thinking only of his own good, not Lance's. If Peter knew that Lancelot would be unhappy as an art student, and in an attempt to dissuade him from pursuing such an unfortunate course offered a new option to Lance (that of going to Cambridge), then Peter (thinking of Lance as a full individual) would have been thinking (and thus acting) virtuously. In this invented scenario, Peter acts externally in exactly the same fashion that he did in the story. It is the internal actions, however, that are the reasons Peter is acting viciously.

At the end of the story, on the other hand, Peter acts virtuously. He learns that Mrs. Mallow is genuinely in love with her husband. Peter knows there is no way that he will ever have what he wants from Mrs. Mallow. He knows that everyone is quite aware of Mr. Mallow's lack of talent. At this point, however, Peter no longer has reasons to suppose that if he just maintains the current situation perhaps sometime in the future Mrs. Mallow will grow to love him. No longer does he have some selfish motivation to continue as he has before. Nevertheless, he does so. Peter's case is similar to the story of the mother and the daughter-in-law in that no external action takes place to indicate the internal moral choice that has been made. Peter could have destroyed the relationships around him, knowing that he stands no chance of getting what he wants regarding Mrs. Mallow -- probably by exposing the Master's lack of talent. Instead, however, he allows things to continue as they are even though he has nothing to gain. It seems
that in spite of his own selfish considerations, he maintains the illusion for the benefit of those around him. He, like M, escapes his selfish concerns by attempting to see things as others see them. This escape is what marks a moral action. Peter does not need to act differently in an external fashion to indicate his internal moral choice. In this case, it is precisely by not acting any differently that Peter manifests his moral action.

Both of these examples indicate that moral actions need not depend on external displays. It is instead the internal considerations that mark a moral action. By stepping outside oneself and paying attention to the individuality of others a person does good. External results may occur from internal decisions, but these external manifestations are not the same thing as the moral choice that takes place within the individual. When one makes such internal decisions, it is often the case that he or she manifests these decisions in the external world. In fact, only by the external are we able to perceive and understand other's moral decisions. It could be called into question that someone has genuinely acted virtuously when that person commits external actions in direct disregard of a consideration of other's selves -- regarding others as only their manifestations. It seems instead that certain internal decisions are going to be expressed externally as a way of showing one's internal decisions -- to solidify and display that internal state. These manifestations, however, are not necessary to what it means to be moral. They are reflections, though imperfect, of internal states and actions. We can abstract from these external manifestations in an attempt to understand the internal workings of another. These abstractions, however, are at best ambiguous in their results. External actions can help to indicate where a particular judgment may need to occur, but they do not in themselves indicate the moral worth of an action. These external actions, however, are often the key to carrying through with whatever new understanding one has gained by escaping his or her selfish considerations -- to
attempt to understand the world and the nature of human relations as they really are.

What leads to decisions being labelled as "moral?" It is the way that we pay attention to others. There seem to be two importantly different ways we can see others -- as means to ends and as ends in themselves. What it means to make this distinction is not immediately, entirely clear. But perhaps the best way to understand this difference is through the exploration of what we mean when we say we know someone. We do not just mean that we know about that other person. Instead, we have come to realize that there is something more to the other that cannot be captured by the particular ways by which that person appears to the world -- his or her external manifestations. These manifestations are more than mere physical appearances. They also include such aspects of that person as the ways he or she thinks about the world (moral and political ideas, for instance) as well as social interactions and relationships. Any and all of these measurable and expressible qualities are important for understanding the individual. They help to indicate and define the person because they are the clues which we use to "see" the other person. These manifestations, however, are not all that there is to another person. Think of the ways that we understand fictional characters. The textual indications and descriptions of that person help the reader to understand the character. These descriptions, however, do not completely and fully embody all that there is to that character. In what can be best described as an intuitive leap, we come to know that fictive character as a real and full individual. In like fashion, we see particular manifestations that other human individuals present to the world. We can use these manifestations as helpful ways of understanding who exactly a person is. These manifestations work as arrows pointing in some general direction, but they do not embody the uniqueness of a particular individual -- we still do not necessarily see the individual as an end in itself. When we think that a
person is no more than the sum of these external presentations, we are making a fundamental mistake. We are missing what is most important about that other person. We are missing what William James refers to as the "self of selves," a notion he is too ready to discard. I mean to argue here that we are making not only a logical mistake when we pay attention to others only as only external manifestations, we are also making a moral mistake. We should not think of others in this fashion.

I have just used the term "should." What about that which I have said implies that one ought to behave in the fashion I have described? Why not merely treat others as instances of categories? To think of others as only their particular, superficial embodiments naturally leads to treating them as objects of manipulation. Why is this? When one thinks of others as only some particular groupings of some general characteristics, we miss the essential and specific nature of that person's character -- that individuality that we can and should respect. If someone is only a peculiar grouping of traits, then we have no reason to respect that person as being in any particular way special. There is a character of being an "end" in others that can only be recognized by understanding that each person is more than just the particular group of characteristics we most obviously notice in our perceptions of the external world. Another way of stating this idea is to say that there is no real reason to respect a being whose essential identity is no more than a list of general characteristics. It is the unique individuality of each person that demands respect. Think of the idea often put forth by environmentalist -- if a particular species of animal or plant were to die out, we would never know how that species could benefit us or our ecosystem as a whole. There is a unique quality to each biological species. In the same way, there is an important difference each person has in relation to all other persons. Though we have similarities, our differences are also important. To know that others are unique
ends leads one to treat those persons with respect. We do not fully know another
person as long as we are treating him or her as just a particular bunch of general
characteristics. Thus, to act as if we do is a mistake. The uncapturable essence of
another person is important. The not knowing the totality of another generates a
sort of mysterious quality concerning the potential of that person. When we think
of others we should understand that we do not fully know that other person. We
cannot fully imagine all that it means to be that individual. We generally see only
external, superficial manifestations. We should not, however, restrict ourselves to
thinking of others in this fashion. To do so would be a mistake.

Why then is it a mistake? I could act as if other people were only the sum
of their external manifestations. This way of thinking, however, would ignore the
ends of individuals, seeing them as only means to some other ends. But what
about these ideas compels one to think differently? The critic could ask, "what
harm will befall me if I ignore what you say?" If the critic is willing to reduce a
system of morality to the way that an individual should act in order to benefit one's
self, then I must be able to show how the selfish individual will benefit by acting
in the fashion I describe. The critic will ask of me why it is that he or she ought to
act this way. What makes the account I give an accurate and useful guide to
human behavior? In other words, I must show that the selfish individual has more
to gain by acting in the manner I describe, rather than by treating others as objects
of manipulation, no more than the ways they benefit or harm that person. When
one notices only the external manifestations of an individual, he or she misses
what is most fundamentally important about that person. The observer fails to
notice that which is projecting the manifestations. Reducing the individual to
merely a set of categories eliminates all potential for morality. Groups of general
terms and instances of categories cannot make moral choices and thoughts. It is
individuals who are able to do this. This is the point of origin of the ability to
choose and to act. Therefore, what is most essential about another is not just some group of categories he or she can be described by. What is most essential is that which makes choices and is able to hold relations to others, because it is this aspect of ourselves that is moral, either viciously or virtuously. Otherwise, we would have no way of saying that a person should be held accountable for their actions. In order to make moral distinctions of any kind we must hold individuality to be an important and real aspect of what it means to be human. Individuality should be given a primal place within the characterization of a person. Additionally, just as one thinks of himself or herself, so should one think of others. We think of ourselves as ends, not as means to ends. We wish to be treated as such, and should understand that there are important reasons for treating others in the same fashion. The proper way to understand another is the drawing together of various diverse characteristics of that person into a unified whole. We often see only one aspect to a person -- the ways that person may benefit or harm us. To understand that there is something beyond such an aspect (an entity holding together all of these diverse manifestations) is what it means to be acting morally. An employer, for instance, might think of his or her employees as only some means to further ends. Is this way of thinking immoral? It is hard to say, given only this little information. I would like to insist that as long as the employer remembers that there is something more than just the ways that these persons benefit him or her, that employer is not making a mistake. When the employer, however, regards his or her employees as only some particular bunch of economic commodities (to borrow a Marxist term), he or she is at least acting amorally, if not immorally. We ought to strive to think of others as more than that which we immediately understand. To do such is to begin to act morally, but this course of thought is often, for practical reasons, extremely difficult (and perhaps impossible). What I am describing, therefore, is a goal. We may often fall short
of this goal. But this falling short should not discourage us from the continual attempt to achieve it -- this continual striving toward something ultimately unreachable is perhaps the ultimate moral action. The striving toward the goal of treating all others as ends in themselves is what drives morality in an important and fundamental sense. Even if it is hard to reach at a larger, social level, it is often more easily achievable on a personal level. This personal level may be the best place to start in our understanding of what it means to be moral. At some point, I learn to see someone whom I am "getting to know" as another individual. This perceived individual is worthy of my respect because he or she, like me, is not merely a part of a larger whole. Just as I am more than the sum of my relations, so is the person I am coming to know.

There are distinct differences in the ways that we treat people we do genuinely know versus the ways we regard people we do not fully know, or are only acquainted with. Not genuinely knowing another individual means that you can be aware only of the categories by which that person can be described -- universal terms that point to, but do not capture the individual. Genuinely knowing someone, however, is having an understanding of that which lies beyond his or her particular group of manifestations. This difference is important. The leap from thinking of others as mere instances of categories to regarding them as individuals is the moment at which true respect for the other can begin. Think of the stereotypes sometimes held regarding particular groups of people. One might have a particular prejudice regarding, for instance, a specific ethnic group or race. Usually this group is a culture that the judging individual is not familiar with. In fact, it is often the case that we have the worst stereotypes and prejudices regarding groups of people with which we are least broadly (or deeply) acquainted. Having formed an impression based on acquaintance with a single member of such a group, for example, we might make the mistake of thinking of
all of that individual's traits as being representative of that group. Thus, having
adopted that stereotype, we carry it around internally, perceiving others we meet
as instances of that class, and, therefore, bearers of the stereotyped characteristics.
Upon understanding that there is more to an individual than the particular
categories by which he or she may be described, we are much less inclined to
think of that person in these prejudiced terms. We must come to know him or her
as something beyond the specific, diverse, and general manifestations we
originally regard to be of the utmost importance, and upon doing so we not only
get a better picture of who that person is, we also come to understand ourselves
better.

The knowing of other "selves of selves" is important for several reasons. We are able to better define and understand who we ourselves are by a comparison and contrast with other individuals. We know others importantly by recognizing not only similarities, but also differences. Others help us to understand ourselves by these important relations between us. This kind of knowledge is different from the sort of knowledge Plato discusses in the Parmenides. It is not just the comprehension of definite, discreet entities. We know others, in the important sense of the word, when we draw ourselves into a new kind of relation with those persons. When we see others as ends we come to genuinely know them. This understanding benefits us as knowers because we are better able to understand ourselves. We see ways in which we are similar to others, thus drawing us into closer relation with those persons, as well as understanding ways that we are different from others, thus helping to define exactly what is unique about ourselves. Aristotle was right when he said that "man is by nature a social and political being." We come to know ourselves as individuals only by standing in these important knowledge relationships to others. The knowing of and the knowing about are two different ways that we have relations to others. Knowing
about others only provides us with general ways of describing those others. The knowing of others, however, is what is most essential to allowing us to come to know ourselves. In this way, individuals importantly exist independent of general relations to others. Our individuality (or identity) can only be known, however, by holding these important knowledge relations to others. Thus, we become more of who we are, and learn more of who we are, only by considering others to be full individuals, existing beyond the more general relationships we normally perceive.

Perhaps a specific example would be of some help to clarify what I mean by these claims. Think of Bellamy in Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight*. Bellamy is a troubled individual. He wants to be loved by God, but feels himself unworthy. He is confused. He wants to be drawn closer to God, but feels that God would reject him because he is unworthy. He does not, however, know how to become more worthy of the love of God without first being closer to God. Thus, he is trapped in inaction. Instead of acting positively, he must act negatively. He does not know how to grow to be closer to God, who he believes will help him. Supposing that it will help him toward this goal, he cuts himself off from those relationships with others that he takes to stand in the way of this goal. Already, Bellamy is making a mistake. He is thinking of others (including God) as beings whose only importance is the ways they help or harm him. Bellamy, in a quest to make himself a better person, does exactly the sort of thing that one should not do if he or she truly wants to become a better person -- he cuts himself off from others. He stops communicating with much of anybody, gives away his dog and possessions, and tries to live in conditions that are as wretched as possible. His motives for doing so, however, are not repugnant. He merely wants to do what he thinks is right. Bellamy turns to a priest for advice, and by writing him letters, hope to gain the knowledge of how to make himself a better, more worthy person. In his correspondence with Bellamy, Father Damien proves himself to be an
extremely wise man. The priest tells Bellamy that if he truly wants to be a better person he is doing precisely the wrong kinds of things. Bellamy should, instead of isolating himself, turn himself toward the service of others. Previously, it could be seen that Bellamy was thinking only of himself. Even though Bellamy wanted to be a better person, he was still thinking of others as either obstacles or aids on this path. He did not even see Father Damien as an individual. Instead, he saw the priest only as a source of advice and help on his quest. Bellamy saw other people as hindrances, so he cut them out of his life. By the end of the novel, however, Bellamy has realized his mistake. He cannot see others only as their manifestations, or superficial characteristics. He learns that Father Damien is not the perfect spiritual leader, and source for advice. Father Damien has his own struggles with faith and is as imperfect and flawed as Bellamy. Bellamy gradually finds that others in his circle of friends, including Moy and Emil, for example, are not merely helps or hindrances for him. He learns that they too are individuals with virtues and flaws just like Father Damien. Bellamy comes to understand that which everyone striving to be better should know -- that people are, by their very nature, dependent on each other. We cannot cut ourselves off from others (reducing them to no more than their superficial appearances and potential for manipulation) and still be human. We need to understand that we can and should have interactions with others whom we consider to be equals and treat as such. By the final pages of the work Bellamy understands these things and is more fulfilled because of it. He once again cares for people and is able to be more fully human by sharing of himself. The destruction of the idea that others can be something important in and of themselves (free from the effects they have on Bellamy's spiritual quest) is what causes Bellamy to have genuine connections with and knowledge of other persons. He can now see that others are as much involved in actions of seeking and questing as he is. At the beginning of the book, Bellamy is
looking for a source of wholeness, something that will make him feel complete. He feels unworthy because he is flawed. To make his being more complete, however, he cuts himself off from others. In doing so, he only further distances himself from a greater and more complete understanding of himself. He does not need to eliminate others from his life in order to be complete. To be complete means the holding of others closely and understanding that they are individual and unique ends in themselves. Just as Bellamy must understand the importance of these connections with others, so should we.

When we cut ourselves off from human interaction -- when we view others as no more than their superficial characteristics -- we are thinking and acting incorrectly. Regarding others as objects of manipulation leads to isolation, and this leads to a destruction of what it means to be human. When the critic says, "Why not just manipulate others? If I am good at it, then I will have my needs and wants fulfilled," he or she is making a mistake about what it means to be human. Human nature requires us to interact with each other. Without this interaction, we not only harm others, we harm ourselves -- we are left with no one to relate to and understand. To understand others as merely collections of general characteristics is to not genuinely understand them. We better understand ourselves and become more fully human when we give up trying to understand others as collections of categorial descriptions. The understanding of another is a unique and important experience. The forming of these bonds is a different kind of relationship. We no longer merely hold the sort of general relations previously held. A new, unique bond is forged. The understanding of others as instances of categories does not require any kind of deep understanding of the other. The relation, for instance, of teacher to student is only the relation of one manifestation to another. The unique relation that forms on a personal level, however, requires an action of that which is beyond the external -- our self of selves. Without these relations, we are cut off
not only from others, but from ourselves. In this fashion, we destroy ourselves on a deep and fundamental level. This sort of severing of relations is damaging for all involved. Think again of Bellamy. He, with good intentions, thought of others only in light of the ways they might help or hinder him. He thought that he must sever bonds of equality and true friendship in order to accomplish his mission. The more he did this, however, the more unhappy he became. In fact, he strayed further and further from his goal -- the forming of unique, completing relations. He was cutting himself off from, rather than drawing himself closer to, other people. On the other hand, when we see others as equals with whom we can interact, and (this is the most important part) of whom we can have knowledge, we can learn more about ourselves and be more fully who we are, as individuals and holders of relationships. The perception of individuality is not always easy, but it does seem to be a natural and important part of human interaction. To cut ourselves off from our equals is to isolate ourselves and destroy our ability to understand our place in the world. To answer the critic's question of why one should not treat others as merely superficial embodiments and expressions is to say that one ought not destroy oneself.

We destroy ourselves through our isolation from others. This sort of isolation is not an external event. This is not the picture of the hermit living away from society and human interaction. The isolation is internal. It is a moral mistake to ignore others' selves. The moral mistake leads one to greater and greater isolation from others. Therefore, acting morally comes into play when we learn to think of others as they should be thought of -- as individuals with their own needs and desires. These individuals are more than the ways that they can benefit or harm us with regard to our own selfish viewpoints. We should, instead, attempt to free ourselves from these concerns by attempting to escape our own viewpoints and see things free from our own prejudices -- as M did to D in The
Sovereignty of Good. The example of M and D is less extreme than Bellamy's case. It is hard to see how M would have destroyed herself by constant isolation from D. I grant, in fact, that M could have been totally severed from D, regarding her as a mere group of labels, but nevertheless continued to hold other meaningful relationships. It does, however, seem to be the case that M's life was more greatly fulfilled in an important way by her new relationship with D. She was allowed not only to better understand D, but she also can see her son better as well. Previously, it was probably a mystery for her as to why her son chose to marry D. Now she understands. Thus, M was drawn closer to her own son. M may also have learned important things regarding her own happiness and fulfillment. D seems to have a certain buoyancy and joy that M can learn from. Thus, it seems that M's own life is enriched and made better by her new understanding of others. By sacrificing her selfish concerns and preconceived notions, M is more greatly fulfilled. In this way, M's personal desires (such as human connection and interaction) were fulfilled only by an unselfish action. M began to see D not only as a group of characteristics. She understood that there was something unique about D. M began to know D not in a general way, but in a personal and unique way. She also began to understand that her son and D have a similar kind of unique relationship. The relationships understood required a deeper level of understanding by M. They required that she commit something more of herself than just her understanding of general characteristics and stereotypes. She became a more fulfilled individual because she (as a unique individual) was allowed to participate in unique relations with other persons.

Perhaps another example would help to clarify my assertion that we destroy ourselves by thinking of others as something less than full and unique individuals. When I was in high school I knew someone closely who I believe saw others less completely than he should have. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to this
person as "Jason." Jason and I were part of the same clique. This clique was a fairly close-knit group, the central core of which was made up by the same people for a couple of years. Jason seemed to think that others in our circle were constantly talking negatively about him behind his back. This was a strange notion for the rest of us, because we tried to regard everyone, including Jason, with respect. Nevertheless, Jason persisted in his belief that people, on some deep level, did not like him. He made it a point to, at all times, be concerned with exactly what everyone in our group said regarding everyone else. The unfortunate mistake, however, was that he did not genuinely understand what we actually thought of one another. He only understood and expressed what we had said in particular contexts. Jason did not seek a fuller perspective on what we had said. With what was a rather incredible memory, Jason was later able to recall what others had said about one another in surprising detail, even after fairly large spans of time. Though his reports were in one sense accurate, (the people quoted had actually said these things), they were in a more important sense false. It was drawing them out of context that falsified them. His motivation, I believe, was to ensure that others did in fact like him (or at least act as if we did). If he had all of this "dirt" on others, he knew that he could ruin others' relationships quite easily. In this fashion, he was thinking of the rest of us only with regard to the ways we might be manipulated to benefit him. This sort of action ultimately destroyed all vestiges of relationships he had with us. His actions proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. By trying to play us against one another, he harmed not only our relationships with each other, but also our relationships with him. We, individually, developed greater and greater resentment toward his actions as we came to understand more fully what he was doing. He thought of others in a particular way, ignoring the greater complexity of our interactions. What really happened was that Jason failed to see the greater complexity that exists within
each individual. He chose to see only one kind of manifestation, and by doing so, destroyed his relationship with each of us. As relationships fell apart, his actions only became more desperate and pronounced. He, like Bellamy, created his own trap and his own unhappiness by not granting to others the sort of respect we deserved. He cut himself off from others through his failure to recognize that we were all more than that which he chose to see. Jason, in this way, saw only general relations and the ways each person might harm or benefit his goal of a further end. He, instead, should have understood that he could not fully understand others while still regarding them as merely means to his accomplishing his own goals. His manipulation of others, instead of bringing happiness and fulfillment, only led to a greater sense of isolation and a destruction of his ability to relate to others, on virtually any level. He could not see unique relations and, thus, was not able to draw his own unique self into important and unique relations with others.

It is the relations that we hold to others where we recognize individuality that are the most important. Another way of spelling this out is to say that these relations and forms of knowledge are the most concrete. Other ways of understanding people rely upon abstract, general descriptions. These unique relations we have with others are concrete because it is through these relations that we fully understand others. Other forms of knowledge, such as those of descriptive categories, are not specific in the sense that these genuine forms of knowledge are. We use these groups of categories as descriptive tools because they are useful for a variety of practical reasons, but they are not all there is to others. We know people in an important sense only when we see their uniqueness -- the uncapturable essence of another. The "uncapturable-ness" of others and our relations to others makes our understanding very difficult to discuss. But, this difficulty indicates the importance of the subject. Our own individuality, just what
it means, is difficult to discuss. We can understand it, however, only by standing in relations to others.

Thus, my answer to the critic: the reason that acting toward others as if they are only the sums of their outward manifestations is morally vicious is because it is ultimately self-defeating. It destroys the individual acting, by cutting him or her off from all important relationships he or she might hold. This isolation is dangerous because our interactions with others allow us to manifest our "selves" to the world. Importantly, we do not understand ourselves or others unless we are willing to grant a degree of uncertainty to the understanding we have. We should not be able to draw our knowledge of others into comparative relations because genuine knowledge of another is an utterly unique experience. It is the sort of experience which allows us to understand what it means to be an individual. We define and understand who we are only by communicating with others and attempting to see them as they really are -- free from our immediate selfish concerns. What it means to be human is to stand in these relations to others, to consider them to be important, and to foster and aid them in their growth and development. We ought to think of others as full individuals -- entities beyond external manifestations -- so that we can have the kind of important relationships necessary to maintaining our humanity. These interactions are more than mere conveniences or practical necessities. They are what makes us uniquely who we are.
Works Cited


