PETRUSCHKA SCHAAFSMA

Family and Christian Ethics

NEW STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

FAMILY AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

In this book, Petruschka Schaafsma offers an innovative appraisal of family. Eschewing the framework of worry and renewal that currently dominates family studies, she instead explores the topic through the concepts of 'givenness' and 'dependence'. 'Givenness' highlights the fact that family is not chosen; 'dependence' refers to being intimately included in each other's identities and lives. Both experiences are challenging, especially in a contemporary context, where independence and freedom to shape one's own life have become accepted ideals. Schaafsma shows the impasses to which these ideals lead in several disciplines – theology, philosophy, sociology, social anthropology and care ethics. She moves constructively beyond them by tapping literary, artistic and biblical sources for their insights on family. Grounded in a theological approach to family as 'mystery' rather than 'problem', she develops an understanding of the current controversial character of family that accounts for its ordinary and transcendent character. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

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NEW STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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Christian ethics has increasingly assumed a central place within academic theology. At the same time the growing power and ambiguity of modern science and the rising dissatisfaction within the social sciences about claims to value neutrality have prompted renewed interest in ethics within the secular academic world. There is, therefore, a need for studies in Christian ethics which, as well as being concerned with the relevance of Christian ethics to the present-day secular debate, are well informed about parallel discussions in recent philosophy, science, or social science. New Studies in Christian Ethics aims to provide books that do this at the highest intellectual level and demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance or in terms of underlying moral justifications titles published in the series.

FAMILY AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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In grateful remembrance of Professor Gerrit de Kruijf (1952–2013)

Contents

General Editor's Preface

Family-related issues have featured in a number of previous contributions to New Studies in Christian Ethics – especially in Lisa Sowle Cahill's *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (1996) and Adrian Thatcher's *Living Together and Christian Ethics* (2002). Yet, until now, the series has never had a contribution that specifically focusses upon 'family'. Perhaps this is because families in the Western world are changing very rapidly and it has become increasingly difficult to find any single definition of the family that takes full account of these changes. It is hugely to Petruschka Schaafsma's credit that she has taken on this challenge and, indeed, done so with such intellectual elan. I cannot think of another account of the modern family within Christian ethics that betters this highly nuanced monograph.

The Prologue opens with an example of complex family life depicted in Marilynne Robinson's theologically nuanced novel *Housekeeping*. It evokes the question of what the family is about and makes readers aware of the difficulty of answering it. The next chapters also begin with a literary or artistic work. They make it possible to create a starting point in dealing with such a controversial theme as the family without immediately becoming part of often polarised debates. Thus, the book can insist from the outset that (unlike many other works on Christian ethics) it is not going to focus upon the 'problems' of families in the modern world but to approach family as a 'mystery' – two terms taken from Gabriel Marcel. This approach corresponds to the book's basic conviction of the ineffable character of what family might mean and enables a theological approach that accounts for a transcendent moment in family. Petruschka Schaafsma elaborates this mystery approach in dialogue with philosophy, sociology, social anthropology and the arts with a sensitivity to moments when reflection reaches what she calls an 'impasse'. These impasses reveal the need for an alternative kind of ethical reflection. As such, the book is also an experiment in Christian ethics.

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In the chapters that follow Schaafsma has a threefold focus upon the family tie, family and givenness, and family and dependence. In terms of the first focus, Schaafsma sees family as 'a separate phenomenon that is rooted in an intuitively experienced, unspoken, yet strong family tie'. She first evokes this focus with Sophocles' *Antigone*, and contrasts her own interpretation of this play with the radical feminist Judith Butler's differing interpretations of it. This dialogue subsequently leads her to Hegel and the recent Hegelian interpretation of David Ciavatta. She concludes that the family tie 'becomes visible much more as a question than as a well-delineated fact with clear implications for acting. Thus, the family tie appears as something family members have to relate to, something they are answerable to but not in the sense that the behaviour corresponding to it can be formulated in general'. Thus, the tie leads to conflict.

In discussing the second focus, Schaafsma starts by analysing two paintings of the Holy Family by Rembrandt, arguing that they have an emphasis on the ordinary character of the family, albeit charged with a sacred meaning. She distinguishes the 'givenness' of family in this sense from that of two current academic debates. First is the use of 'naturalness' in ethical views of family. Schaafsma criticises both the philosopher Brenda Almond and the theologian Don Browning for their defence of a strong notion of a particular, nuclear form of the family as scientifically established and therefore 'natural'. Second, reviewing recent kinship studies within social anthropology, she argues that they confirm 'the difficulty of making sense of what family might mean. In the so-called new kinship studies, there is much more sensitivity to this difficulty than in the ethical studies of Almond and Browning which favour the language of the 'natural'. This anthropological approach has impasses of its own, however. To get beyond them, a mystery approach to givenness points to an 'active mode of taking life as people find it seriously and answering it. This activity is a creative one of finding one's own answer to the appeal implied in the moment of givenness'.

The third focus of dependence is evoked by means of the complex family portrayed in Hosea. Alice Keefe's reading of Hosea highlights the acknowledgement of a greater dependence of all creation rooted in God as being at stake in Hosea's prophetic family life. From this starting point recent advocates of 'acknowledging dependence' are analysed in care ethics – in the fruitful, later work of Alasdair McIntyre in *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999) and in Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar's *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics* (2017) within New Studies in Christian Ethics.

In addition, Schaafsma explores Schleiermacher and the French philosopher Jean Lacroix in order to reach a more 'constructive' understanding of family dependence – concluding that dependence is not 'something incidental' but 'something permanent'.

> Being a family means being dependent on each other in different ways that change during the course of life and as a result of specific occurrences. This changing character does not do away with dependence as such. Even when people are no longer in contact with their family or when all family members have died, there is a real sense of dependence. Family members remain a crucial part of one's identity; they are persons without whom one cannot think or understand oneself.

For Schaafsma a constructive understanding of family dependence finally 'takes the form of an evocation, in that it reveals the natural presence of dependence in the family context. It reveals it as a mystery. This mystery is embedded in the most fundamental mystery of human life, that of its dependence on God.'

In the Epilogue these constructive reflections are reconsidered together with the critical ones with an eye to the experience within the family of a moral claim which inescapably forces itself upon us. It is to such experiences that a mystery approach to family points. A concrete elaboration is given in a brief analysis of the double 'confession' of both love and guilt that Lacroix highlights as characteristic of family.

This very thoughtful study uses a remarkable range of authors and disciplines in order to reach a constructive understanding of the family that takes full account of the complexities of modern families. It makes a significant and original contribution to New Studies in Christian Ethics and admirably shares its two central aims:

1) To promote monographs in Christian ethics which engage centrally with the present secular moral debate at the highest possible intellectual level.
2) To encourage contributors to demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance or in terms of underlying moral justifications.

Robin Gill

Acknowledgements

This book is in my name, but, when writing it I depended on the confidence and involvement of good colleagues, dear friends and everyday family. I have been able to complete it only because others also believed in the book and especially in the substantive approach long before it was more fully elaborated. All of them I would like to thank here emphatically.

That belief that this book would be realised was made concrete in all the opportunities offered to me by my employer, the Protestant Theological University, under the leadership of the rectors Gerrit Immink, Mechteld Jansen and Maarten Wisse, opportunities that included not only the long-term career path in which the completion of this book played a crucial role, but also a sabbatical that is at the basis of this book. Of crucial importance in this process in particular were the chair holders – initially Jan Muis and later Maarten Wisse. They championed my cause at the management level. Above all, they sometimes saw better than I did what characterised my theological-ethical approach to family. Such keen observations along with their unconditional support helped me a lot, both in the formal process and to keep my spirits up.

The same goes for the other immediate colleagues with whom I could talk about what theology should be today and who made time to read my texts and to comment and engage in critical and constructive conversation about them – Rick Benjamins and Pieter Vos, and, in recent years, my colleagues at the Moral Compass Project, Theo Boer, Rob Compaijen, Sophia Höff, Stef Groenewoud, Klaas-Willem de Jong, Dominique Klamer, Ariën Voogt and Margriet Westers. I am grateful that, on the basis of this academic trajectory, the Protestant Church also gave me the confidence to continue my work as a professor of theological ethics. I experience that as a special appeal.

My chair was given the title 'theological ethics'. My predecessor in this post, Gerrit de Kruijf, had at one point deliberately chosen the title 'ethics' for it, although theology and church were in a way a much more natural

bedding for his academic work than they are for mine. He just didn't want the rubric of 'theological' to limit his opportunities for conversation. 'Morality is conversation material of all people. God does not narrow the view, but rather opens a wide face', he wrote in his book *Ethiek Onderweg (Ethics along the Way)*.[1] That we still use his book in ethics teaching in the master phase is precisely due to this. For the eight opinions of this eschatologically oriented *ethica viatorum*, De Kruijf naturally drew on the Bible and ethical literature. He also sought out fellow travellers in whose texts God 'is sometimes hardly mentioned, if at all'. In this way, he also hoped to enter into conversation with people unfamiliar with church and Christianity, let alone theology.

It is not difficult to see that aspiration reflected when I find my travel companions in this book in philosophy, social anthropology or care ethics in which God is not explicitly discussed. Precisely in the framework of that broader conversation I explore theology's own contribution. That is why I am delighted that this book has been included in the New Studies in Christian Ethics series, which aims precisely to deepen and enrich the secular moral debate with 'an understanding that is not entirely secular'.[2] I dedicate the book to Gerrit de Kruijf, who showed how the 'wide face' can be sought precisely from the distinctness of a theological perspective. Without De Kruijf's generous encouragement, the research for this book would never have gotten off the ground.

The book itself would certainly never have been completed if I had not had a 'ghostwriter' in Udo Doedens, who in countless ways attuned me to the 'Ghost' – who gave *air* when under too much pressure, appealed to the *soul* when it was once again hiding and animated into me 'the *breath* from which we spring'.[3]

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[1] 'Moraal is gespreksstof van alle mensen. God zorgt niet voor blikvernauwing, maar opent juist een wijd gezicht' (Gerrit de Kruijf, *Ethiek Onderweg: Acht adviezen* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008), 8).

[2] See for this citation Chapter 1, note 66.

[3] This phrase comes from a poem written by Willem Barnard in response to the text of Matt. 8:1–13 and set to music as song 840 in the hymnbook of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Roel A. Bosch, Jan Breimer, Pieter Endedijk et al., eds., *Liedboek: Zingen en bidden in huis en kerk* (Zoetermeer: BV Liedboek, 2013)).

The Difficult Question of What Family Is About

Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* is a story about two sisters, Ruth and Lucille, who from a young age experience a quite complex family life.[1] We become acquainted with them through the story Ruth narrates about their childhood. This is how the book opens:

> My name is Ruth. I grew up with my younger sister, Lucille, under the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster, and when she died, of her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster, and when they fled, of her daughter, Mrs. Sylvia Fisher. Through all these generations of elders we lived in one house, my grandmother's house, built for her by her husband, Edmund Foster, an employee of the railroad, who escaped this world years before I entered it. It was he who put us down in this unlikely place. (3)

Ruth, the main character of the novel and its first-person narrator, introduces herself to the reader by referring to family members of her own generation and previous ones and to the house she shared with them. She calls them by their names – in the case of the ladies accompanied by a formal title, Mrs or Ms – while the 'unlikely place' where the house is built is not named. This may give the impression that family ties with 'generations of elders' are the most obvious facts to refer to when you start telling others about yourself. It is clear, however, that these family members are not simply enumerated like the facts of life, without conscious thought. Ruth clearly makes a selection in the members she mentions and adds specific facts to the mentioning of the different members in their family positions.

The absence of many of the persons to whom Ruth refers to introduce herself is striking: they have 'died', 'fled' or 'escaped this world'. The most obvious family members she refers to, however, are even more fundamentally absent: Ruth does not say anything at all about her parents in these first lines. They are absent from this first enumeration of relevant family

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[1] Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (1980; republ. London: Faber & Faber, 2005). The following numbers in the main text refer to pages in this edition of the book.

members. It may be because she, apparently, did not grow up with them. They are not mentioned in the second place either. Ruth first focusses on a family member who was also absent as he died long before she was born: her grandfather Edmund Foster. He had worked his whole life for the railroad. The railroad was also the cause of his untimely death. In a 'spectacular derailment' (5) on a moonless night, the train he was travelling on slid off the rails. It was spectacular because the train ran on the very long bridge over the lake bordering Fingerbone, where Foster lived.

It is not just the spectacular character of the derailment that makes Ruth imagine her grandfather in such a forceful way. It is the impact his untimely death in the lake has had on the entire family. She introduces her grandmother from this perspective as 'a religious woman', 'though she never spoke of it, and no doubt seldom thought of it' (9). Ruth's grandmother regards life as an easy road to travel, with a destination where 'everything one had ever lost or put aside' (10) would be found again, including her husband. They would 'meet and take up their lives again, without the worry of money, in a milder climate' and hopefully 'a little more stability and common sense'.

Ruth's grandfather had periods of absent-mindedness and also unexpected literal absence. Her grandmother hoped that this would change when they reunited, but she 'did not set her heart on such a substantial change' and 'became as good a widow as she had been a wife'. For five 'serene, eventless years' (13), the three teenage daughters 'hover around' their mother, continuously touching, watching and following her graceful presence, until, suddenly, one after the other, they all leave home within six months. Molly goes to work for a missionary society and Helen and Sylvie marry men they did not even introduce to their mother first.

Ruth's introductory story is not just about the 'generation of elders' as such, however, in their presence and absence. The story is made concrete by focussing on how the fate of the Foster family is interwoven with the presence of the unnamed lake bordering Fingerbone. Helen, Ruth's mother, drowns in the same lake which had swallowed up the train in which her father was travelling. When Ruth and Lucille are still young children, Helen sails in a borrowed car 'from the top of a cliff named Whiskey Rock into the blackest depth of the lake' (22). A search is made for her body, but it is never found. Neither was Grandfather Foster's.

As a result, not just the lake but even water has become associated with the unnatural deaths within the family. Ruth explains: 'I cannot taste a cup of water but I recall that the eye of the lake is my grandfather's, and that the lake's heavy, blind, encumbering waters composed my mother's limbs and

weighed her garments and stopped her breath and stopped her sight' (193–4). The lake is omnipresent in the life of the people of Fingerbone as well. Every spring the town floods – although not up to the house built by Ruth's grandfather, which is in a higher part of the town. As a result of the flooding there is water everywhere, always.

Lucille and Ruth spend a lot of their time together at the lakeside. So does their aunt, Sylvie Fisher, who eventually takes care of them after their grandmother has died. Sylvie's absent-mindedness and occasional disappearing recall her father's conduct. Given their mother's fate, Sylvie's presence at the lake is a sinister one for Ruth and Lucille with constant overtones of a threatening suicide.

The omnipresence of the lake means the omnipresence of the deceased family members. They are present not just in memories or histories but, through the water and the lake, in a physical kind of way as well. Ruth lives with them as if they are still there. The living presence of other family members also often reminds her of the deceased. She shares their thoughts and shares her thoughts with them. Several times, she imagines scenes of a complete, reunited family – which recalls her grandmother's religious views of being reunited with her husband. The scenes are narrated as if the deceased are just as realistically present as the living.

As her sister, Lucille seems the one most likely to be Ruth's fellow traveller for better or for worse. For a long time, they are 'together, always and everywhere' (109). After the death of their mother, the sisters are cared for by their grandmother. When she dies after five years because of old age, her two elderly unmarried sisters-in-law, Lily and Nona Foster, arrive. It is clear from the start, however, that they are unfit for housekeeping. Upon their arrival, they already think that Helen's sister, Sylvie, might make a better guardian. Sylvie, however, never again contacted any family member after she left home to marry. Her name was omitted from her mother's will, and she has not even heard about her mother's death. Then, unexpectedly, Sylvie herself sends a letter to Fingerbone giving her address. Lily and Nona get in touch with her and she arrives. She does not seem a reliable mother figure or capable of housekeeping, let alone raising two teenage girls; she looks more like a transient, a drifter. Everybody is relieved, though, and Sylvie stays.

Unfortunately, the ominous signs soon prove accurate. Sylvie is completely absent-minded and hardly speaks to her foster daughters. The house becomes a mess, full of empty cans and wastepaper. The lights are always turned off. Most of the time Sylvie is out and Ruth and Lucille are constantly aware of the threat of her leaving permanently. The girls start to

skip school and spend their days at the lake for months on end, without Sylvie noticing.

Then things start to change. Lucille becomes annoyed at the situation at home. She starts wearing better clothes and no longer wants to be seen with Ruth. Finally, she decides to leave home and live with one of her teachers. From this moment on, the relationship between Ruth and Sylvie changes. They talk more. Sylvie takes Ruth on a trip and shows her a personal secret, a deserted house in a valley on a nearby desert island where she has apparently spent much of her time.

In the meantime, Lucille's departure has further aroused the awareness of the citizens of Fingerbone and has alarmed them as to what is going on in the Fosters' house. The sheriff arrives and announces that a complaint has been lodged against Sylvie for turning Ruth into a transient. At this point, Ruth's way of narrating the story suddenly changes. She engages in several meta-reflections on the evil of broken families and, on the other hand, on the impossibility of truly breaking these relationships (e.g., 176, 185–6, 190, 194).

It gradually comes to light that Ruth and Sylvie belong together, although this is not stated explicitly. In a half-hearted attempt to clean the house as the start of a new life, they set it on fire and flee just before the hearing on Sylvie's custody of Ruth. At night, they walk across the long railroad bridge that spans the lake. 'The terrors of the crossing were considerable' (215). The walk takes the 'whole black night' (216). Ruth says the crossing changes her. Something happens during the crossing when the wind rises so much that they have to cling to the bridge. It seems they hear 'some sound too loud to be heard, some word so true we did not understand it, but merely felt it pour through our nerves like darkness or water' (215).

Sylvie and Ruth stay together, living as transients. The book does not end by painting their life together, however. We find Ruth again day-dreaming, imagining Lucille: Lucille living in the restored Foster house at Fingerbone; Lucille living elsewhere, making a favourable impression by her determinedness; Lucille married; again Lucille waiting in their family house 'in a fury of righteousness, cleansing and polishing, all these years', dreaming that Sylvie and Ruth return 'talking together in words she cannot understand' (217); Lucille living there with 'pretty daughters' and Sylvie and Ruth sneaking into the house, making it into the old mess and 'leaving behind a strong smell of lake water' (218); or, finally, well-dressed Lucille in Boston, waiting in a restaurant for a friend.

Ruth then enumerates all family members as 'not there': Sylvie and herself, her mother, her grandmother and grandfather. 'We are nowhere in Boston. However Lucille may look, she will never find us there, or any trace or sign' (218–19). The final line is also for Lucille. Nobody will notice that her thoughts are 'thronged by our absence'; 'she does not watch, does not listen, does not wait, does not hope, and always for me and Sylvie'.

Housekeeping may be characterised as a book about family, but not in the sense that family is a topic the characters often explicitly refer to or reflect upon. Neither is it clear what family should mean or be. What it might mean is revealed not so much in Ruth's reflections on family at a metalevel but in the ways these family members act towards each other, share their lives, figure in each other's thoughts or daydreams. The theme of family forces itself most emphatically on the reader in the striking self-evidence with which the characters act upon family ties. Family means something for them, is central to their feeling, acting, and thinking. The ways in which they shape their togetherness differ in crucial ways and are anything but unproblematic, however. Thus, the novel rather gives rise to the open question of what family may be or should be than answers it.

When one starts pondering this open question, the story does give challenging suggestions for an answer. The first lines of the book, as we saw, in which Ruth self-evidently refers to family members to introduce herself, may illustrate the obviousness that family seems to evince. In their brevity, moreover, these lines point out that family is about relationships that are somehow given and imply dependence. Here, the relationships are about care for children. The call to care is not heard explicitly in the story, however, nor are the thoughts on whether one should respond. The relation of dependence is somehow obvious; the care it implies seems a given. When your daughter commits suicide, you raise her children. When you die, your sisters-in-law are appointed as guardians. When they flee, another daughter is pressed to assume custody.

This is particularly striking in the case of the custody after their grandmother's death. Ruth and Lucille do not seem to have any living relationship with their caretakers Lily and Nona Foster when they become their guardians. Nevertheless, these elderly women, who do not have any children themselves, apparently experience as self-evident the call to care for their nieces, the grandchildren of their deceased brother, and answer it. So does Aunt Sylvie, who is equally unfamiliar with children in general and with her nieces in particular.

The apparent self-evidence of taking on these caring relations on the basis of family ties contrasts, however, with the actual shape this care takes.

The great-aunts Lily and Nona Foster accept custody over Ruth and Lucille hesitantly and leave after some time. Aunt Sylvie, however, who has never had any contact with her family since she left home to get married, does stay with the girls. Her staying, however, is characterised by her absence, and Lucille leaves as a result. Does Lucille then break the family tie like her mother did? Ruth does not think about it in those terms. She continues to relate to her sister in her imagination, even after she has practically lost all contact with her.

Even from this short impression, it is clear Ruth's story is told in a way that somehow highlights the family tie. The relationships that matter are all family relations. The only important tie with an outsider, the teacher with whom Lucille eventually chooses to live, is not given clear shape. Thus, the story makes one think about what a family is. Family is depicted as lives that are interwoven. Often, this intertwinement does not come to light or is not given any attention until it is under pressure. This is the pressure of a mother who commits suicide, a grandmother who takes her place and is herself a widow and so on. Family may suddenly become visible as a given tie that implies certain responsibilities and actions, even a change in one's life as in the case of the guardianship of the aunts.

What is the nature of this family tie that it becomes the basis for such radical decisions? What is the rationale behind granting the custody of two teenage sisters to two elderly women who are perfect strangers to them or to a middle-aged woman who has never lived a life like that, not even lived in a house? And – to point to a different aspect – why is the intertwinement of family members' lives of such a kind that it shapes who you are even if you have never met these persons, like Ruth and her grandfather? The story of the Foster family is anything but a success story. It makes one wonder whether this somehow given, self-evident responsibility for family members is a good thing or just an idealistic misconception. Are family members related for better or for worse? What is the value of family if it is marked so emphatically by death, absence, abandonment and neglect? In brief, *Housekeeping* confronts its readers with the question of what family might and should mean in a moral sense.

The story also reveals the difficulty of speaking in general about what family means. The book is all about women, women who are members of a family. What is it that they share? This question cannot be answered in general because they all give their own interpretations of it, give shape to the family in completely different ways. One may say that they share a past marked by the deadly accidents in the lake. They share a community. Ruth speaks about her mother with Sylvie and Lucille. They share memories, like

those of the months spent by the sisters at the lake. They share special moments like visiting the island. They share daily life in all its ordinariness. Ruth remarks about this sharing:

> Sylvie did not want to lose me . . . She did not wish to remember me. She much preferred my simple, ordinary presence, silent and ungainly though I might be. For she could regard me without strong emotion – a familiar shape, a familiar fact, a familiar silence. She could forget I was in the room. She could speak to herself, or to someone in her thought . . . even while I sat beside her – this was the measure of our intimacy, that she gave almost no thought at all. But if she lost me, I would become extraordinary by my vanishing. (195)

The connection between Ruth and Sylvie finally turns out to be one they do not want to lose. They give shape to it by their ordinary presence to each other, act as they are in each other's daily presence. Again, it is a largely absent presence. This is precisely the presence Lucille cannot stand.

Presenting *Housekeeping* as a book that gives rise to the question of what family is about does not mean claiming that this is the best perspective to understand it. Rather, as soon as one starts viewing the story from this perspective, one starts thinking about alternative perspectives that seem just as appropriate, like the spatial notions of the house and the lake or the existential ones of coping with death, absence or loneliness, of mourning and remembering, or about the fact that all the characters are women.

Robinson herself says in a 1994 interview about the book and its reception that she did not write it with the intention to publish it but was just 'trying to write a book that I would want to read'.[2] The things she was aware of when writing it were that the story was situated in her home county in the Northwest and was related to her own family in which women were 'enormously important' and 'powerful figures' (233). In another, earlier interview she describes it as a discovery ('My goodness sakes!') which occurred soon after she started writing the novel, that it was a novel with only female characters.[3]

The grandfather had died in the first scene with the train falling from the bridge. As for other male characters she had tried out in the novel, she 'didn't feel they were especially *doing* anything for the novel'. In this interview Robinson doesn't explicitly mention 'family' as the big theme.

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[2] Thomas Schaub and Marilynne Robinson, 'An Interview with Marilynne Robinson', *Contemporary Literature* 35/2 (1994): 231–51, at 232.

[3] Sanford Pinsker, 'Marilynne Robinson', in *Conversations with Contemporary American Writers*, Costerus, New Series, Vol. 50 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985), 118–27, at 121–2.

She does refer to nurturing, indecipherable 'clustering together' and 'mysterious manifestations' of ordered connections:

> What I'm interested in is the tendency of people, on the one hand, to nurture one another and, on the other, an understanding of how complex that idea is. I think of families, or even towns, as things that cluster together for reasons we don't know and by methods we can't judge. In the same way that things in the physical world are essentially mysterious manifestations of the tendency of things to come together and be orderly, our lives operate on similar principles. (121)

In reaction to a question on whether she is influenced by nineteenth-century American fiction in her depiction of 'the rare kind of nurturing' between the main characters Robinson admits her indebtedness to this literature, which, in her view, is 'pretty obsessed with bonds', mostly male ones. These bonds are 'something that is elevated above the ordinary experience of life and that justifies everything. Perhaps that same kind of thing, in my version, is something I find very lovely and persuasive. No doubt I've been partly formed by it. I like especially the unspoken quality you get from these companion relationships' (123).

Although *Housekeeping* cannot necessarily be called a book about family, it is noteworthy that this issue is emphatically discussed in the large field of secondary literature. It is said that 'understanding the causes and effects of families shattered by the loss of parents or children is a major theme' in the book which is elaborated by interweaving the family narrative with 'allusions to myths, fairy tales, songs and poems'.[4] Ruth is said to intuit at the end of the book when she visits Sylvie's secret desert island that 'family structures are as impermanent as any post and beam construction'.[5] The final flight from Fingerbone is also interpreted as 'risking everything for the sake of preserving' what is of 'higher priority', that is, their 'kinship with one another'.[6]

The book has been claimed by feminists because of the tension between conventions and alternative ways of living.[7] It has been read as presenting a view of family as rooted in feelings and emotions and as such, a critique of

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[4] Julianne Fowler, *Family Narrative and Marilynne Robinson's* 'Housekeeping'*: Reading and Writing beyond Boundaries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 21–2.

[5] Matthew Potts, '"The World Will Be Made Whole": Love, Loss, and the Sacramental Imagination in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*', *Christianity & Literature* 66/3 (2017): 482–99, at 486.

[6] Martha Ravits, 'Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*', *American Literature* 61/4 (1989): 644–66, at 663.

[7] Karen Kaivola, 'The Pleasures and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*', *Contemporary Literature* 34/4 (1993): 670–90.

middle-class conventions. It has just as well been claimed by advocates of family values as propagating a view of family as rooted in blood ties secured by a legal system (673).

The latter debate does not just reveal the variety of interpretations of *Housekeeping* but reminds one of the delicate nature of discussing the subject of family as such. Family is a controversial topic via which the boundaries between conservative and progressive are drawn. The dominant perception is that family is a conservative topic; open-minded, non-bourgeois people do not seem eager to bring it up. It speaks for *Housekeeping* that the story resists too easy an appropriation by any of these camps. It is not a success story about familial resilience nor a plea for opening up traditional views on family or anything like that, but it does give rise to reflection on what family is about.

The question whether 'family' is a good perspective from which to interpret a literary work is not controversial just in the case of Robinson's *Housekeeping*. At present, 'family' is not exactly widely recognised as a relevant topic for high-quality literature. It is striking that 'family' is not an entry in most contemporary encyclopaedias, companions to or handbooks on literary fiction.[8] The genre of the 'family novel' has the connotation of home-loving domesticity and therefore trivialness. Scholars who study it as a genre point out that their interest is all but shared and often explicitly renounced.[9]

The history of the genre is said to be of no interest anymore in English literature scholarship. There are hardly any studies on it. When the family novel is discussed as a genre it is often described in a pejorative sense as 'boring, predictable, lacking in depth, conservative, necessarily written in a realist style, portraying only stereotypical figures and roles, and merely good at depicting local color'.[10] Its low standing is in part explained by its association in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with female authorship and by the confusion with family romances and so-called domestic literature.[11]

It is often assumed that the genre is conservative in the sense that it seeks to present an ideal nuclear family life threatened by the decline of

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[8] For example, literature encyclopaedias by Cambridge and Oxford University Presses. Anna Berman makes the same observation as regards the entry 'family novel' ('The Family Novel (and Its Curious Disappearance)'), *Comparative Literature* 72/1 (2020): 1–18, at 1).

[9] Berman, 'Family Novel', 1; Kerstin Dell. *The Family Novel in North America from Post-War to Post-Millennium: A Study in Genre*. Universität Trier (2005), https://doi.org/10.25353/ubtr-xxxx-15a1-c8a9.

[10] Dell, *Family Novel*, 37.   [11] Dell, *Family Novel*, 7, 31; Berman, 'Family Novel', 9.

modernity. Literature that paints alternative forms of family life would thus not be associated so much with the term 'family'. Disputes about the idealised status of the nuclear family also find their ways to fiction literature – for example, in the way relationships between LGBTQ people are portrayed.[12] African-American novelists write on family to critique simple disqualifications of 'fatherless families'.[13]

What interests us about these different forms of family fiction and the debates among their interpreters is not so much a precise definition of this genre or its status, but rather the question that arose from our choice of starting with *Housekeeping*: Why call a story a narrative about family? In what sense may one say a story gives rise to the question what family might mean? In one of the rare articles that reflect on what a 'family novel' could mean, Robert Boyers, a scholar of English literature, tries to formulate an answer to this question:

> In speaking of the family novel we speak not merely of a work the burden of which is to deal with the various members of some family. Such a work is likely to focus attention on one family member more or less at the expense of others, whether because the one character is superior by virtue of intelligence, capacity for self-conscious reflection, or flair for self-dramatization, or because the novelist wishes to make certain points about loneliness, the difficulty of achieving independence, or some such thing, which requires that he deliberately limit his focus. What I should like to examine is a literary phenomenon one of whose main objects is the illumination of social process, more specifically, the way certain novelists managed to show us how families grow, take shape, influence members, develop a momentum no one within that given family can control or even understand. That is to say, I am concerned with a novel for which the life of families is sufficiently interesting in itself not to be subsumed under some broader quest for the sources of alienation in society at large, for the key to the middle classes' loss of confidence, and so on.[14]

This formulation of what a family novel is about characterises it as focussed, not on the members, but on what they share. Family is not subsumed under some other theme like 'alienation' or 'loss of confidence', but addressed by taking its readers along in a process, a dynamic that is somehow specific to families. It is in the family that a 'momentum' develops beyond the control and understanding of the individual members.

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[12] Kasia Boddy, 'Family', in *American Literature in Transition: 1990–2000*, ed. by Stephen J. Bur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 312–28, at 314–15.

[13] Boddy, 'Family', 320; Dell, *Family Novel*, 210.

[14] Robert Boyers, 'The Family Novel', *Salmagundi* 26 (1974): 3–25, at 3.

What is it that is specifically family-like in this momentum? Boyers' formulation reveals that it is hard to say in general what is specific about family, even when it characterises a literary genre. It is easier to say what it is not. Anyone who tries to indicate why a specific piece of fiction literature would count as 'family fiction' may have this experience. This is similar to the experience that resulted from becoming acquainted with the story of *Housekeeping* – that is, that of growing attentive to the question of what it is that connects family members – and to the difficulty of answering that question.

On the one hand, *Housekeeping* reveals family as a distinct sphere or aspect of life and, on the other, the novel makes one wonder what it is. Robinson seems to point to this ambiguity in the interview cited earlier when referring to the 'tendency of people to nurture one another' as both obvious and complex. Our 'clustering' together in some kind of order like that of family is 'for reasons we don't know and by methods we can't judge'. These are 'essentially mysterious manifestations' and of an 'unspoken quality'.[15]

We could have stated at the outset that this paradox of family means something while remaining difficult to say in general what it means. That may easily have been misunderstood as a trivial remark. For our study, it will turn out to be a crucial insight, however. This insight is better evoked indirectly, by first being confronted with the lived reality of family as expressed in literary or artistic works and then reflecting on it than by stating it directly on a metalevel of scholarly reflection. In Chapter 1, we will indicate how we think a constructive moral reflection on family can be elaborated starting from this paradoxical insight, and why such a reflection is urgent given current academic debates on family.

After formulating this outline, we will in each of the actual elaborations in the chapters start from a literary or artistic expression of what family might mean. By opening our study with *Housekeeping* we have thus, in a first, tentative mode, found answers to the question of what family is about, as well as, just as importantly, an awareness of how this question may arise and of the specific difficulty of giving shape to further analysis and understanding of being a family.

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[15] Pinsker, 'Marilynne Robinson', 121, 123.

Family as Mystery

We opened this study, without any introduction, with the story of the Foster family featured in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*. This novel evokes the question of what family is about, and it makes us aware of the difficulty of answering it. It is not just because of this double evocative power that we began in this way, however. It is also because this story helps us to get a start on a subject, an area of human life that is peculiar in many ways. Family is one of the most common aspects of our lives and one of the most problematic. It is both neglected in research and overstudied, framed both as a dated theme and as one of utmost contemporary relevance.

Family is at the heart of many nostalgic dreams about a return to the good old days in which the roles and patterns of male and female behaviour were obvious. It is a cherished topic among Christians as well as certain neoliberal politicians and nationalistic populist parties. Therefore, family is a suspect subject for the progressively oriented. 'Family' has become a focal point for controversies and culture wars. It is, moreover, a theme that cannot be mentioned without people reacting on the basis of their personal experiences. It rakes up all kinds of individual memories and feelings, often strong ones. They colour one's view of the general need to discuss this theme. This hotchpotch of associations, strong feelings and especially controversies to which the topic of family gives rise makes it hard to discuss. Furthermore, bringing up the topic as such is easily interpreted as serving some hidden conservative agenda – which is not the rationale behind this book.

This study seeks to explore what family is all about without becoming immersed in this hotchpotch. The reason is, first of all, that none of these controversies as such is the inspiration for this book. Its basis does not lie in intense personal experiences with family, whether dysfunctional or exceptionally happy. Our study does not arise from major concerns about the well-being of family in current Western societies, nor is its goal to promote a stronger family life. The reason behind it is not distrust, given the injustices or wrongs, like various kinds of abuse, somehow related to family

life. Nor is it a plea for a more open conception of family, beyond traditional views.

This book's purpose is more basic, open and neutral. Its first question is simply what family might mean. What is family all about? Of course, this question does not come out of the blue. The reason for posing it is first our intuition that in the heated debates for or against the family, as well as in the strongly emotional individual reactions, the basic, open and neutral question of what family could mean is often lost. What family means is supposed to be clear among both family's defenders and its critics: traditional role patterns, indissoluble relations, blood ties, genetic kinship or duties that cannot be cast aside. We aim to step back from these ways of dealing with the topic of family and find ways to address the lost question of its possible meanings.

The second reason is the current controversial character of the topic of family itself. We think it is important to pose the question of what family might mean to avoid what is often the result of the current commotion: the digging in of positions, a lack of open conversation or debate, deadlocks. To avoid these problems, it seems helpful to step back and ask what is at stake in the topic of family in our time. What does family symbolise or stand for that it is such a controversial topic? Why do people love or hate it, regard it as an attractive theme to discuss or something we do not need to take notice of? Understanding what family might mean is thus in this book also a way to understand ourselves better in our time. This means we do not leave entirely open the question of what family might mean. We will focus on the aspects of family that we think are difficult in our time and turn family into a charged, even controversial topic.

Our approach is thus a situated one. It looks for what family might mean in a particular time, in a specific context. This context is a Western one. This qualification is not meant as a precise demarcation or a label claiming exclusivity, let alone superiority. It is meant as a sign that we are aware that we do not speak from nowhere, and that the perspective of our study is limited. We will try to account for this specific situation as transparently as possible. Obviously, it is impossible to speak about family in general or to give a global or universal view of it – that is why we have usually omitted the article 'the' in conjunction with 'family' which is used by default in much literature on the subject. On the other hand, it does not seem impossible that, by speaking from a specific context, insights come to light that are relevant elsewhere as well.[1] In the current Western context,

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[1] In Chapter 3, we will deal extensively with this issue by going into recent discussions on the status of kinship among anthropologists. In this discipline, the traditional idea that kinship is a universal fact

family is a controversial issue, as our brief sketch already indicates. It is for others to decide whether this is also true for different contexts with which we are not familiar. Our study is not intended to be comparative.

Apart from the charged character of the topic of family in our time and context, there is a second difficulty in dealing with the topic we discovered in the Prologue. Reading the novel *Housekeeping* with an eye to the theme of family evokes the difficulty of discussing what family might mean. The novel makes the reader feel the strength of the family tie, of the appeal inherent in family relationship, but it also confronts one with the impossibility of objectifying it. The different family members, after all, think about and act on this tie in completely different ways. All these ways of thinking and acting shed light on what family might mean. It is not that one of them reveals the correct meaning. Even if they, like the great-aunts Lily and Nona, defy the family tie as one of care, the tie also means something to them, as they regard the younger aunt Sylvie a better guardian.

Together, family members' different ways of thinking and acting towards each other create a feeling for the family tie in the reader. The story evokes this feeling. It shows that the tie cannot be reduced to one common denominator like blood relationships, relations of care between different generations, or the people who share a household, or even a combination of them. Enumerating these notions would still not give good insight into what a family is. What is more, as soon as such definitions are stated, the exceptions come into view: marriage is not a blood relationship, nor is adoption, and, even when family members do not receive each other's care or share a household, they may perceive each other as family.

When these examples are discussed, we again lose the general topic of the family and see the overarching notion split into all kinds of specific family relationships. This may in part explain why the question of meaning

of human life that takes shape in different cultural forms is heavily criticised. Nevertheless, the term 'kinship' continues to be used in some universal sense that presupposes recognition of this phenomenon across cultures. This is well illustrated by the following remark by Janet Carsten. In response to a recent publication by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins provocatively called *What Kinship Is – And Is Not* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2013), she writes:

> Across cultures, eras, and social backgrounds, the sense that kin 'participate intrinsically in each other's existence', that they share 'a mutuality of being', and are 'members of one another' (Sahlins 2013: ix) is intuitively graspable – not as an analytic abstraction, as many definitions of kinship seem to be, but in a way that palpably makes sense of a whole range of human experience as described in the ethnographic record, and also our own. (Janet Carsten, 'What Kinship Does and How', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3/2 (2013): 245–51, at 245)

gets lost in the many debates on the importance or dangers of family. In order to discuss what family might mean we therefore need an awareness of the difficulty of answering that question. This is why we started with *Housekeeping*.

The fact that *Housekeeping* is not a story about a happy family – whatever that may be – helps to protect against what is often deemed to be one of the greatest risks in reflecting on the topic of family: that of forming an idealised view of it. The impression of doing so is easily created if one approaches family not in order to discuss its flaws or injustices but, in a constructive way, to find out which aspects and meanings of human life it highlights – as we will do in this study. Therefore, this criticism will be a central one to discuss in the rest of our investigation. The family story discussed in the Prologue, however, already points out that the problematic and dangerous aspects of family life are never out of sight when asking what family is about. Rather, investigating this meaning should contribute to understanding the specific risks of family life and dealing with them.

Our question of what family is about thus meets with two difficulties. First is that of how it can be dealt with as a basic, open and neutral question when family is such a controversial issue in a Western context at present. Second is that of how meanings of family can be elaborated when they are so hard to formulate in a general sense. These two perspectives will guide our explorations – the former by what we called stepping back, the latter by integrating the awareness of the unspoken and perhaps unnameable character of family in a constructive investigation of what family could mean.

Obviously, we are on moral ground when reflecting on the question of what family could mean. Moreover, our aim of analysing why family is a controversial topic and what is at stake in it, formulated as an attempt to understand ourselves, implies a normative stance. The title of our study, 'Family and Christian Ethics', localises it explicitly in the field of ethics. As the arguments already presented indicate, however, this does not mean we aim to give a normative outline of what family should be or look like from a Christian perspective. Neither are somewhat classic issues related to reflection on family in Christian ethics discussed head-on. The topic is simply too controversial and inscrutable to allow for such a direct approach.

Our study is an attempt to develop an alternative approach precisely by analysing the concrete impasses to which reflection on family in different scholarly disciplines often leads. These impasses reveal the characteristic difficulty of the topic of family in our time, but they can also be analysed as

to their revealing potential in hinting at the alternative ways to approach family in ethical reflection. As such, this book is also an experiment to do ethics – more specifically theological or Christian ethics – in a different way. This 'different way' cannot be outlined now, in advance, before having analysed current theorising on family. In this chapter, these analyses of current scholarship will be given, resulting in an outline of our alternative project under the heading of a 'mystery approach'.

In subsequent chapters, this approach will be both further elaborated and critically assessed in relation to three issues. In Chapter 2, this is the issue of whether it is at all possible to speak about family as a distinct sphere. This will be explored by focussing on the idea of a 'family tie' as a mostly unarticulated bond that is experienced as given and as a basis for acting and expecting something from other members of the family. This requires that we delve deeper into what 'givenness' might mean, which will be the subject of Chapter 3. Subsequently, Chapter 4 specifies the general attitude implied in the view of family as given by means of the notion of dependence. The Epilogue, finally, takes stock of what approaching family as mystery means for ethics. The choice to concentrate on givenness and dependence, as well as the choice for a 'mystery approach' will be explained in this first chapter. All these choices are closely linked to problems that occur in current scholarly approaches to family, and it is to these which we will now turn.

'What Is Family About?' As a Basic, Open and Neutral Moral Question

For a moment, we leave aside the second difficulty of formulating what family might mean in order to concentrate on the urgency of reflecting on it as a 'basic, open and neutral' question. With this formulation, we are stating that our reasons for turning to the topic of family are not to defend or attack it, not to worry about the vitality of family, or, on the contrary, its impeding influence on individual self-realisation. In the current Western context, such strong pro and contra sentiments prevail and often presuppose a specific understanding of family. This meaning is mostly implicit, not approached as an issue but regarded as self-evident. It is this polarised situation that we hope to open up by stepping back and asking this basic question of what connects family members and in what sense family is a separate sphere of life with perhaps a logic of its own. Dealing with this question sheds light on what is at stake in the current controversy and may thus contribute to overcoming it.

Stepping Back from Controversies

To step back, it seems important first of all to regain a sense of family as a moral topic apart from current controversy. The topic of family is at present easily associated with other very prominent topics like divorce, same-sex relations, adoption, domestic abuse, care for elderly family members and so forth. Family, however, is not just a topic of ethical concern because of these hot issues. People experience family as an important reality, a substantial factor as regards their identity and in shaping daily life. Family is acknowledged as a crucial factor in upbringing and care. Notions of duty come into play here. The need for ethical reflection arises as soon as such duties are no longer seen as self-evident.

Examples of this need not be as intense and dramatic as those of the sisters Ruth and Lucille in *Housekeeping* to raise moral questions. They are also trivial and everyday. Is it my duty to help my children with their homework, or is this a task for the school? Should I take a week of care leave when my elderly father has the flu? What is my role as a sister in comforting my brother whose relationship has ended? How should family relationships be given shape when members live far away from each other? In what ways should one be committed to family members outside the nuclear family? Questions like these are part of everyday morality and confront one with the question of what responsibilities family ties imply.

Moreover, the association of family with strained relationships is obvious. The responsibilities one can feel do not always imply that these are good or satisfying relationships. For many people, family relationships are the most difficult riddles of their lives. As a result, moral questions concerning how one should behave towards family members are easy to imagine and the urgency of reflecting on them is felt almost daily. The fundamental question of 'what family is about' underlies these concrete issues. What connects family members in a specific way that is not, or not entirely, comparable to other relationships? It is this question that we refer to as 'basic'.

The focus, subsequently, on this fundamental question as an open one means the present study is not just interested in – to name an obvious demarcation of family – blood ties or what is called 'biological kinship'. We will of course discuss these notions, as they are predominant demarcations in a Western context. However, we are also interested in the ties that bind, for example, a woman to the children of her partner from an earlier relationship and the children to their mother or grandparents. We are equally interested in the ties of a man to his adopted son and to the

so-called biological parents of his son, his genetic sisters and the non-genetic brother with whom he grew up; or in the ties of lesbian spouses to the child one of them bore, to the sperm donor by whom the child was conceived, to the donor's parents who have no other grandchildren and to the aunt of one of the spouses who happens to live nearby.

We have in mind all the experiences of the special tie which people may associate with being family and is somehow distinguished from being friends, neighbours or something else. This does not mean that family experiences may not overlap in part with experiences related to other kinds of relationships. We do not claim any radical exclusiveness for the meanings family may reveal. On the other hand, the starting point of our analysis is that, in our time, in our context, family confronts us with specific experiences and meanings that are not so emphatically found in other relationships.

To explain the neutral character of our approach, it is important to understand the current moral controversies regarding family against the background of a more general moral uncertainty or confusion. This is the result of developments that have been summarised as the increased pluralism of world views and fragmentation of moral traditions. Morality is conceived of as a matter of individual preference. These developments are also visible in relation to family. Forms of family life and ways of living together have become increasingly diverse in the past century, especially since the 1970s, and this diversification has not yet reached its limits.

These changes are well known and may be grouped into three broad categories. There are the changes in the forms of partner relations: marriage is declining while cohabitation is increasing; divorce has become much more common, same-sex relationships are more widespread and legal. Divorced people with children build a new family life, often around each of the partners. Newly composed or blended families come into existence as a result of new partner relations. These developments are partly intertwined with the processes of women's emancipation, in particular their participation in the labour market.

These processes also influence a second field of changes, that of having and raising children. Families have become smaller and motherhood is undertaken at a later age. Having children is no longer obvious but often perceived as a conscious choice. New birth technologies influence these decisions, as well as the possibility of same-sex couples having children. The status of the wanted child has implications for its upbringing. The role of family is emphasised in particular as regards developments on the level of emotions and value. On the other hand, both parents working outside the home or being a single parent leads to an increase in institutionalised childcare.

Third, the position of families within society has changed: in Western societies, the extended family is less prominent as a primary network. Individualisation and emancipation result in more independence of the individual from the family, also economically. At the same time, this individualisation nourishes an opposite development. As more people live alone, family relationships become more important to fall back on in problematic situations. The increase in global migration also changes family life. On the one hand, it means that family is no longer nearby and, on the other, that obligations remain of financial family support or the duty to care for children who are left behind.

Beyond Worries, Appreciation and Reluctance

When these changes in family life are mentioned, the pictures are often accompanied by the suggestion that something is crumbling or eroding. The idea seems to prevail that, due to an enormous choice in form and intensity, family life has become so complex that the question arises as to whether individuals can handle it. Many people are worried about what is called 'the current state of the family', in part because of their own experiences with broken relationships. These worries presuppose that family is somehow a good that should be protected. Ethics may thus easily be drawn in to underpin the goodness of family and indicate that it should be supported and how this can be done. In such types of ethics, the basic question of what family might mean and in which sense it is a good is not a neutral one: the goodness is presupposed and often a specific form of family life as well, with heterosexual parents and their biological children at its core. As we will see, this often means ethics leans heavily on what are presented as facts from social or natural sciences, which confirm the assumed value of family.

On the other hand, this goodness of family and worries over its decline are all but generally assumed. There is wide consensus that the democratisation of family life and the rise of a culture of intimacy with a lot of individual freedom should be valued. Common sense in what may be called leftist circles has it that family life, especially that of the 1950s, is not something to be desired. It is seen as a more or less outdated phenomenon that is surpassed by chosen relationships. If family relationships are taken seriously, it is in terms of this model of conscious choice as well. As a result, raising the topic of family as such meets with suspicion from progressive circles. It is discussed with an eye to its problematic implications, not as a neutral issue.

Given the current moral insecurity, reflections on family thus easily become polarised in oppositions of apparently secure positions in favour of or against family that do not allow for a basic discussion of its meaning. As a result, the fundamental question of what family symbolises is not posed so much as a neutral question. A reluctance for the latter approach may finally also arise from a less negative stance – that is, the objection that family is simply a fact of life which has always been there and will always be there if human life is to continue.

What could be meaningfully said or researched about something so obvious? Why should we bother about family? Everybody seems to know somehow what they mean by family, even in the current situation of great diversity in family life. Nobody is looking for general formulations of meanings, duties or rules – if these could be formulated at all while doing justice to their diversity. People are happy to figure these out by themselves. It is a private affair and there is no need for something like 'family ethics'.

Moreover, such an ethics suggests that a common denominator can be formulated that covers the enormously diverse forms of family life we find at present. Does not this diversification point out, though, that it is impossible to speak in a general way about what family might mean? Objections motivated by an emancipatory agenda add that such a general speaking easily privileges dominant family patterns and does not contribute to resisting the marginalisation of non-mainstream family life.

Family is thus, on the one hand, an obvious moral topic, but not necessarily in the sense in which we would like to approach it. We aim to contribute to understanding what is at stake in the current polarisations without becoming part of them precisely by posing the basic, open and neutral question of what family might mean. It is basic in that it asks for meaning at the fundamental level underlying different kinds of family relations and behaviour, like those between partners or parents and children. It is open in the sense that we do not define beforehand what a family is, but include what people experience as family. It is neutral in the sense that it is not prompted by worries over family decline or persistence. We pose this question in a time in which family has a controversial status.

We see a better understanding of this status as a central task of ethics. Ethics should bring the difficult aspects of being and thinking about family in our time to light and explore alternative ways of dealing with them. We will see that this approach should not be misunderstood as one of solving the difficulties. In line with the difficulties of naming what family might mean and of speaking about family in general evoked in the Prologue, we aim for ethical reflection that makes us aware of this ineffability and allows

us to explore the boundaries of what may be said and clarified and what cannot be named.

A Focus Regarding Family: Givenness and Dependence

We have already indicated that we do not leave the question of what family might mean entirely open. We will focus on the aspects of family that we think are difficult in our time and turn family into a charged, even controversial topic. As we said, the context from which we start our investigation and which we roughly indicated as Western will become most visible in this focus. It presupposes a specific understanding of our time and context. We will try to account beforehand for this understanding as much as possible in this chapter, but it cannot be made entirely plausible here. Its adequacy will have to be proven in the actual elaboration of the aspects in the following chapters, where we also analyse current academic debates related to these themes. What we can clarify beforehand are the general assumptions that lie behind this focus.

Givenness and Dependence in a Neutral Sense

We assume that what makes family into something controversial is first of all that family relations are not freely chosen but discovered to be already there, to exist without people having deliberately organised them like this. The field of what is not chosen but somehow given is a sensitive one in our time. It is in this aspect that we localise the first main confrontation the topic of family holds for our context today. The second one has to do with the kind of relations family embodies. We would like to characterise these as relations of dependence. As with givenness, this term is meant in a neutral sense – that is, not yet implying any moral evaluation. Family relations are of such a kind that people are somehow implied in each other's identity. Family members are part of who people are, for better or for worse. It is this intertwinement, entanglement or interwovenness that the term *dependence* indicates here.

The connotations attached to the notions of givenness and dependence lead to the heart of the family controversies. Both concepts are part of what may be called a conservative sphere of meanings. Asking to pay attention to givenness may easily evoke a view of life oriented to what is presented as 'what has always been the case'. Dependence is generally experienced as an unfavourable condition implying a lack of freedom and autonomy, even oppression or a pathological situation. We will deal with these connotations more elaborately in Chapters 3 and 4 in particular.

At first sight already, it is clear that the pros and cons regarding family referred to earlier can be related to different evaluations of these aspects of givenness and dependence. Conservative voices in current family debate regard family as the crumbling locus of life 'as it used to be'. They regard the view of human beings as unique individuals who face the lifelong task of independently giving shape to their own lives as a threat to necessary structures of familial support and care. Others, however, regard family as an important hindrance to developing individual identities. Givenness and dependence seem to be keys that may be helpful in unlocking current controversies on the topic of family and understand what is at stake in them.

We think the experiences that may be associated with these terms are not very often part of the debates on family. Our study aims to make them visible and address them in order to deal with them without ending up in those well-known controversies. For this purpose, we need to evoke these experiences here in a first sketch, while the rest of our investigation will be dedicated to exploring the value of this focus.

The Controversial Character of Given and Dependent Family Positions

In the Western context in which this book originates family relationships are not of the kind where free choice dominates. This characteristic can be found in phrases like 'relationships by birth', 'blood' and 'biological or genetic relationships'. They express the fact that people find themselves part of a certain network of relationships without having decided to do so. Nobody chooses one's parents, aunts, grandparents, or nephews. Having children may be perceived as a choice, but it is more of a desire, a wish that may be fulfilled or not. When one actually conceives a child, this reality is experienced much more as something 'taking place' or 'happening to one' than as something deliberately chosen. It is different from most of what one wished for or was afraid of beforehand.

Much the same holds for partner relations: one desires a life with the other and may ritually shape an official 'start' or public announcement of one's 'choice for another'. However, most people will experience all the turning and tossing previous to the big 'decision' as of an entirely different order and thus standing in no direct relation to the actual experience of sharing life with a partner or children. This life encompasses much more than what can be taken into account in the moment of actually choosing. One does not know that choosing the other will lead to this life. One decides to share life for better or for worse, but nobody knows in advance what that will mean. At least, this

is a very peculiar kind of decision or choice, one that is not easily kept alive in the face of an overwhelming experience of not being able to choose.

Living together is a strong factor in shaping one's identity. Again, this shaping is not so much experienced as consciously chosen; it takes place, mostly without being noticed. In the case of a partner or a child, one discovers after a while one's life as intertwined with that of the other in deep, ineffable ways. As regards family members with whom people grow up, this interwovenness is even more experienced as one in which one finds oneself. This may be difficult, but the majority of families do not perceive of this as a reality not living up to their choices. The discourse of freely and consciously making choices thus captures aspects of family relationships in the sense of choosing one's partner or deciding to be open to having children, but this does not do away with the dominance of basic experiences of the family setting as something that is not being chosen.

It is this specific meaning that creates friction in a time when people are supposed to be or actively encouraged to become independent individuals in unique ways who freely choose their own paths in life. What about the fact that family members are also 'one of us', share a family history, behave along the lines of family customs and have responsibilities for their non-chosen family members, who also take responsibility for them? To put it briefly, in the Western context, the notion of family seems to stand for the given, non-chosen part of life and dependence upon others in unknown and often unnameable ways. People of our time are not very well equipped to deal with these aspects of life. Family is the place where people are very much faced with the given side of life and in particular with being fundamentally related in deeply incontrollable ways, in both joyful and sad senses. Family is pre-eminently where people experience the fact that things cannot be managed but simply exist or happen.

Another aspect that adds to these experiences of not actively shaping life but of finding oneself placed in it and determined by others has to do with the character of family positions or roles. The connection between family members is of a kind in which every person has a specific position, indicated by a name – son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister and so on. These positions happen to one. Outside the context of family, one usually needs to be qualified to enter a particular position or job. This is true of adult professionals, but also of children. For example, to function as a pupil in the school system, one needs a basic command of the school's primary language.

Within families, however, the positions people hold are not based primarily on capacities or abilities. People find themselves present in their roles and are not able to orchestrate them. One may hope to become

a mother, sister or grandfather, but one cannot arrange it by becoming qualified for it. Again, partner relations and having children are the kind of family relations in which at least some orchestration and qualification plays a role. Most people, however, probably marry or have children without having read books about it or attended courses on marriage or raising children. In such cases, they do not enter the position of spouse or parent on the basis of some proven suitability. It happens to them, which is why the language of gift, as well as that of burden, figures in these cases.

This language already indicates another side to these family positions – that is, they largely cannot be undone. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth has a father, and he continues to be her father even though she does not know who he is or where he lives. If he were to reappear some day and make himself known as her father, this could still be a meaningful position, even though he has not been actively involved as her father in the past. In a similar way, the sisters-in-law of Grandmother Sylvia and, later on, Aunt Sylvie appear in the story as Ruth and Lucille's guardians. Their becoming guardians is a result of their family positions, not of their being qualified or familiar with the children. They take care of the children, but they do not become their mothers. People cannot simply replace each other in family positions. Positions or roles are specific to family members. Moreover, their character is dependent on the existence of the positions of the others.

Family is a web of dependent relations in which the knot of each position is constitutive for the other knots. This is also true of positions that are no longer fulfilled, as in the case of dead or absent family members. Marilynne Robinson emphasises this in an interview on *Housekeeping*. In reaction to a question on whether the relationship between Ruth and Lucille breaks up and whether that between Sylvie and Ruth replaces the bond with Ruth's deceased mother, Sylvie's sister, Helen, Robinson argues:

> Actually the bond doesn't break between Lucille and Ruthie any more than it did between Sylvie and Helen who have completely lost touch with one another. They don't scatter in the sense of losing consciousness of one another . . . I think there's a way in which your life is appended, is accomplished, by people whom you seldom see, people who, when you *do* see them, you can't talk to them very well, people who have died – the good grandmother, for example – and you exist always in reference to them. So that even though the biographical bonds between people may break or become overextended, the absolute proximity you associate with significant people in your mind never ceases.[2]

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[2] Pinsker, 'Marilynne Robinson', 120.

Robinson uses the phrase 'significant people' and does not explicitly refer to family here. It may not be by chance, however, that in *Housekeeping* these 'significant people' are all family. In our view, family in particular confronts one – at least in our time and context – with these associations in one's mind with 'significant people' as being in 'absolute proximity'.

In other areas of life, positions end when one does not fulfil them properly. In the field of labour, for instance, people are in principle replaceable by any other person who has similar capacities. We are familiar with the idea that we have to be qualified in order to achieve positions, but that these qualifications do not make us unique fulfillers of these positions. In families, however, people do not assume a position primarily on the basis of their being qualified for it, nor are they replaceable in these positions. Even if partners separate or parents are no longer involved in the care for their children, something of the position remains, albeit perhaps only in terminology. Of course, people who raise children in the absence of their so-called biological parents usually mean much more to their adopted children than their biological parents do. As, for example, the quests for biological fathers in recent cases of anonymous sperm donation illustrate, these positions are not without meaning.

Precisely as regards these points of irreplaceability and the fact that being qualified for the position is not what leads one to fulfil that position, family relations differ from others. Both aspects add to the character of family positions as not subject to arranging. This is another point of contrast with dominant ways of looking at positions and relations implied in them. This contrast does not mean that there are no overlaps. It matters how people fill family positions, and it is important to perceive of family positions as implying qualities people need to live up to. It is not on the basis of these qualities that they enter into these positions, however. Moreover, in these positions, family members cannot be replaced by other members, although others can fulfil specific tasks or functions.

A final aspect of the non-chosen and interdependent character that relates to the given family positions is the characteristic of inequality. In current Western views of relationships, people attach great value to equality. The person to whom one relates is expected to make a contribution comparable to what one invests in the relationship. Moreover, the other should not dominate or always be in the lead. Also, it is usually preferable to have relationships with people who are not quite unlike ourselves. The democratisation of relationships is a recent but by now firmly established ideal. The plea for children's rights is an apt example of it.

Family members, however, are clearly not related to each other as equals. The family positions involve different tasks as well as a hierarchy or asymmetry. Parents give life to their children and raise them. Children receive life and upbringing from their parents and are dependent on them in the most basic and fundamental sense – without parents they die. Of course, they may be raised in an institutional setting instead of a family, but this does not do away with the fact that the child–parent family relation is one of utmost dependence. What parents give to their children is usually much more and especially of a very different kind from what children give to their parents. Children may be said to be principally in debt to their parents. This is not a debt in the sense that it should be paid off, however. One may even wonder whether the language of balancing and debts applies to being family, for raising children is usually a source of joy to the parents – in that sense, children give their parents a lot, but this is not a reciprocity that makes them equals. The amount of inequality involved in family relations once more makes it contrast with dominant ideals of good relationships.

This first sketch of the difficulties of givenness and dependence as experienced in current family life should not be misread as an attempt to pin down what family means in a direct way. This would be contrary to our earlier comments on the difficulty of naming what family might mean. This sketch should only serve to make transparent in a first, rough way what we mean by givenness and dependence in relation to family, and why we think these are the fields of meanings to investigate further. The experiences to which we refer by the terms *givenness* and *dependence* are not exceptional but everyday. They are experiences everyone has to come to terms with. This is easier when these are good, meaningful experiences contributing to human flourishing. Even when this is the case, however, difficulties remain due to the views of the good life and good relationships that currently prevail. Our study addresses this discrepancy by studying family through the lenses of givenness and dependence.

Given the controversies on the topic of family, it is not easy to find appropriate thinkers for an investigation in the basic, open and neutral sense indicated. Moreover, the big changes in family life, including its moral status, have inspired an enormous amount of research in all kinds of disciplines and the field of what may count as family-related topics is vast. In the current climate of specialisation of scientific research, this leads to varied and detailed research into single family-related topics, but not so much to attention to our fundamental question of what family might

mean.[3] We will elaborate on the relevance and urgency we nevertheless see for our approach in analysing contemporary academic research that seems to have some affinity with our interest.

The Current State of the Family

In sociological research family comes into view in a more or less general sense in studies on the changes in post-industrial societies after the Second World War. Here, one finds a rather straightforward analysis of the controversial status of the family, which may also be related to our idea that family is currently experienced as standing for givenness and dependence. Family is seen as a crumbling institution as a result of ideals of individual moral freedom and independence. There is agreement on this point among classic sociological accounts of varying kinds, such as those of Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman.[4]

In their analyses from the 1990s onwards, such scholars relate the postwar changes in family life to the great value people attach to free choice and equality in relationships. Moreover, they point out that the nature of the private sphere has changed. Here the intimacy between spouses as regards both sexuality and emotions or the inner life is of paramount importance. This is seen as a recent, post–World War II development based on earlier Romanticist views from the end of the eighteenth century. These sociologists, however, do not agree on how the consequences of these developments for the family should be evaluated.

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[3] It is remarkable that 'family' is not a topic for disciplinary introductory handbooks or encyclopaedias in social sciences or humanities. 'Family' is addressed, not as a separate topic for a lemma or article, but only in combination with more specific themes ranging from marriage or couple relationships to resilience and genomics. On the other hand, 'family' has been studied in new disciplinary branches like 'family (evolutionary) psychology' and 'family sociology', or from a more applied perspective in 'family therapy', 'family law' or 'genealogy'. In handbooks on these family disciplines, however, the general issue of what it might mean to be a family does not seem to be reflected on as a separate theme either.

[4] This selection of authors does of course not claim completeness but is meant to point out the agreement on this point among leading sociologists. Another prominent sociological account of family is found in the work by David H. Morgan, who, however, argues in favour of qualitative sociological research into family practices instead of approaching family as a structure or institution (*Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); *Rethinking Family Practices* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)). A different focus is present in another classic, the recently republished *Families, Children and the Quest for a Global Ethic* by Robert Rapoport (1997; republ. London: Routledge 2018), which focusses on the importance of the contributions of families to the increasingly globalised 'New World Order', localised in raising children who can constructively participate in it.

The Rise of Love Relationships to the Detriment of Family Relations

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim interpret these developments as resulting from a new ideal, even a 'latter-day religion' – that of self-realisation through love.[5] Love as the central project of personal life has replaced stable institutions like religion, class, marriage or family roles. Central to this view of love are emotional and sexual satisfaction for the individual, which are considered their own project of trial and elaboration. It is a project that has to be negotiated between partners as well, influenced, moreover, by the love images that the market presents. Expectations are high, which puts a great burden on partner relations, especially because they are no longer strongly embedded in a larger network. Thus, the chances for disappointment are high, as are the risks of an intimacy that turns out to be harmful.

Therefore, the Becks argue in favour of a societal order that enables and supports real (gender) equality in relationships. This seems to mean a reinvention of family. The authors protest the prevalent illusion of a return of the old nuclear family or the invention of a 'post-bourgeois' one but do not elaborate on this new family life (165–6). They largely remain within the boundaries of explaining the current situation with respect to its tensions and paradoxes and corresponding risks. As regards family life, they notice that it remains paradoxically, just like marriage, an extremely important ideal despite its disintegration (171). This contradiction is explained as displaying two sides of the same quasi-religious faith in love. The most telling example of this faith is divorce, where existing family relations are sacrificed for the sake of love, a love that is 'truer' than the one left behind (173–4). There is no attempt in this sociological interpretation to make sense of the phenomenon of family in general apart from the central belief in love.

Giddens' analyses show many similarities to the Becks', but he interprets the developments from the 1950s as 'the rise of coupledom' and understands that rise as the expansion of democratic ideals.[6] Family in the old

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[5] This is the theme of the final chapter of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, translated by Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), in particular 170ff.; the following page numbers in the main text refer to this book until a new text is discussed. In Beck-Gernsheim's later book, *Was kommt nach der Familie? Einblicke in neue Lebensformen* (Munich: Beck, 1998), the focus is not so much the earlier thesis of the central belief in love but the differentiation of family life as regards divorce and post-divorce family making, life planning, the central role of women in care, the chosen child and multicultural families. The latter theme of family in a globalised world, especially the shape partner love takes when partners live abroad or come from different countries originally, is the central topic of the Becks' joint study *Distant Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

[6] See chapter 4, 'The Family', in Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives*, 2nd ed. (London: Profile Books, 2002), 57–8; on this topic compare also his *Transformations of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), in particular chapters 6 (94–6) and 9 (188–96).

sense of the 'industrial world', which was a unit of a primarily economic character, has disappeared. In this model the couple was 'only a part' of the family unit. Bonds with children and other kin were as important as those between spouses and usually even more. At present, however, the couple whose relationship, including 'sexual attraction', is regarded as based on love (59), has taken the place of the old extended family. The 'old ties' between people both within and outside the family have now been replaced by what Giddens calls a 'pure relationship' (61). It is the ideal of a relationship based on love, intimacy in the sense of a 'democracy of emotions' (63) and thus a trusting openness towards each other in an ongoing dialogue.

All these aspects presuppose equality and the absence of 'arbitrary power, coercion or violence' (62). Giddens points out the striking parallel between this ideal and public democracy. This 'pure relationship' also underlies current views on parent–child relations and friendship (61). There can be authority, as in the case of parents over children, but in principle all people are equal. Giddens emphasises the major character of this change and concludes: '"Coupling" and "uncoupling" provide a more accurate description of the arena of personal life now than do "marriage and the family"' (59).

Giddens describes his time in terms of a straightforward replacement of family by coupledom. On the other hand, like the Becks, he also points to the longing for the so-called traditional family as characteristic of current Western countries (53–7). Of all institutions, family is the most surrounded by nostalgia. Thus, in the Western world more than anywhere else, family is a 'site' and even a 'metaphor' for the 'struggles between tradition and modernity' (53). Giddens criticises this nostalgic longing for its imprecise view of family and blindness to the obvious flaws of the non-modern family – a privileged position for men, inferior roles for women, children and people outside heterosexual marriage and a corresponding 'sexual double standard' with a lot of freedom only for men (54–6).

Giddens does not, however, address the apparent paradox that the replacement of the old family structures with coupledom and pure relationships goes hand in hand with the longing for a traditional kind of family. He does not analyse why family is the battleground between conservatives and progressives. Why do people not wholeheartedly embrace the new 'pure relationship' with its crucial, democracy-promoting implications? That this is not what interests Giddens may at least be partly explained by the fact that he clearly favours the emergence of the pure relationship: the 'democracy of the emotions in everyday life . . . is just as important as public democracy in improving the quality of our lives' (63).

Bauman also reflects on relationships around the turn of the millennium and pays more attention to this tension between current forms of love relationships and a longing for the lost reality of the old family.[7] He regards this tension as fading, however. The 'double bind' of living in the two worlds of unpredictable, troublesome love relationships and the given one of kinship has had its day (26). This was the former situation in which the 'belonging' experienced in unchosen kinship relations somehow compensated for the instability of love relationships dominated entirely by the principle of free choice. It was itself the result of the evaporation of the idea that love relationships could become 'like kinship' (29).

This has turned out to be a passing situation, however. At present, the desire for 'belonging' is stilled by 'communities of occasion' or 'networks' – that is, 'floating coalitions and drifting enmities [that] coalesce for a time, only to dissolve once more and make room for other and different condensations' (34). The vulnerable world of free love relationships – understood as something one may 'fall into' as well as 'out of' – no longer needs the world of kinship or family as its difficult other. The focus is on acquiring skills that help one cope with what is perceived as the inherently volatile character of partner relations.

Bauman evaluates this situation of liquid, fragile love very negatively. He emphasises what is lost by the development of what Giddens calls the rise of the 'pure relationship' – dependency on, unconditional commitment to and trust in others (90). This is a very difficult situation to live in, but Bauman takes it as a fact. His analysis is very critical but not marked by nostalgia. The uncertainty and loneliness that result from liquid love is soil for a hope for togetherness and morality, albeit a hope and not a certainty (93). His aim is not to elaborate on this hope but to diagnose the current problematic situation.

In all three analyses, family only comes into view as a past reality. As such, it is at most the subject of nostalgic desires. The topic of family is taken into account only in the description of the present situation as a contrast to prevailing developments and ideals. Although the new ways of shaping intimate everyday living together are at least diverse and, especially according to Bauman, far from crystallised, it is clear that family is about a world that is past. It is no longer a meaningful category or term for understanding human togetherness.

Love, freedom and equality are the relevant lenses for grasping current relationships. They are used to understand the changes that have taken

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[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), in particular chapter 1, 'Falling In and Out of Love', 1–37.

place in all kinds of family-related phenomena like parent relations, having children, the balance between work and private life or the role of the state in private affairs. It does not make sense to use 'family' as an umbrella term that indicates a factor these phenomena have in common. 'Family' stands for aspects of life that are no longer relevant – non-chosen bonds or chosen but unbreakable ones with well-defined gender roles, dependencies and authority. For the Becks and Giddens this new situation is to be welcomed, while Bauman regards it as very problematic though inescapable.

Insofar as these analyses give insight into what family currently stands for or symbolises, their approach resonates with that of our study. Moreover, their conclusions are in line with our assumption concerning the tensions between the givenness and dependence characteristic of family life and current ideals of freedom, autonomy and equality. However, the sociological interpretations of interest in family as nourished by nostalgia, and therefore not really to be taken seriously, mean that they no longer regard it as a relevant object of study. For example, they do not consider in detail why family is not simply left behind as a kind of ideal if it is in fact something of the past. Is this only because of conservative sentiments? The sociological accounts do not explicitly address the fact that there is, apparently, something in the topic of family that keeps bothering or attracting people. The approach in our study is, again, more open and neutral than these. If family stands for lasting or given relationships of dependence in particular as opposed to current flexible and fluid ones, are these not meanings to ponder? Givenness and dependence remain aspects of life even if thinking of life as an individual project is more self-evident. May not a closer look at how givenness and dependence are lived in families be a way to take these aspects of life into account and show ways of making sense of it, in practice as well? These questions resonate more with research that criticises the idea that family is something of the past. We turn to these critical voices in order to further relate our approach to current family research.

Unmasking the Contrast Paradigm by Pointing to Family Diversity

While the aforementioned authors mention family primarily as fragmenting, and as the object of nostalgic longings, there is also research that takes this longing more seriously and opposes the paradigm of family decline. Remarkably, some authors start from a similar analysis of the crucial turn to love and free choice as the basis of intimate relationships but do not portray family as the contrast to these developments. In the historically oriented theories of, for example, the philosopher Luc Ferry – who owes

a lot to the earlier French family historian, Philippe Ariès – it is pointed out that attaching great value to family is a rather recent development.[8] He shares the analysis of our time as dominated by the ideal of free autonomy in choosing one's life course and by the rise of romantic love, including the importance of equality and intimacy.

Ferry does not conclude from this, however, that the importance of family is fading; rather, it is being upgraded. In modernity relationships are no longer considered in rationalist economic terms as a form of contract but are measured by the criterion of love.[9] This is indeed, as the Becks indicated, a great revolution, but it is one that gives rise to a new form of family life, the modern family. Marrying 'for the sake of love' means 'for the flourishing of love in the family, the love of children and, more widely, the bond between generations' (8). The child has changed from a useful economic factor into a treasure that crowns the relationship of the parents and should be approached with great affection.

The framework in which these changes occur is the rise of a separate private sphere. As a result, currently a 'formidable explosion of intimacy values' takes place.[10] Family is one of the few – perhaps the only – social institutions that is alive and moreover stable (98–9). As such, its role in and influence on the public domain is massive. The crucial importance of love as the basis for the partner relationship spreads from the private domain to the public sphere. There it becomes the basic value of society, which results in interest in the aspects of private life as central themes of public policy – health, education, help for the elderly, the environment and the ensuring of the possibilities for personal development and flourishing (50–61, 144–6).

In a similar vein, other, more profound historical accounts go contrary to the views of the history of family life in modernity as one of decline. The historians Georg Fertig and Mikołaj Szołtysek observe a gap between family sociology and historical approaches to family like historical demography; these disciplines are in fact cognate in their approach of the study of family.[11] They argue that in much family sociology the past is taken into account only as a contrast to the present. In particular, sociologists focus on aspects of

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[8] Luc Ferry, *Familles, je vous aime: Politique et vie privée à l'âge de la mondialisation* (Paris: XO Editions, 2007); Luc Ferry, *On Love: A Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

[9] Ferry, *On Love*, 44–50.   [10] Ferry, *Familles*, 126.

[11] Georg Fertig and Mikołaj Szołtysek, 'Fertilität und Familienformen in Europa: Eine historische Perspektive', in *Handbuch Bevölkerungssoziologie*, ed. by Yasemin Niephaus, Michaela Kreyenfeld and Reinhold Sackmann (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 179–200, at 180–1.

current family life that contrast with what they perceive to be the 'classical family' – that is, the modern nuclear family of breadwinner father, housewife and children in their private sphere. This modern family is seen as different from the extended family of premodernity, which was largely defined by its economic function. Initially, historians agreed with this picture, but from the 1970s onwards, it has been revised in such a way that the result is the opposite: an orthodoxy opposed to such popular theories of modernisation. Fertig and Szołtysek analyse this change as fitting in with what they regard as the general academic historical approach of criticising common sense views of history.

As regards family-related topics, historians counter the generally acknowledged picture of modernity and the twentieth century in particular as a time in which individual autonomy becomes the standard for the good life, which is distinguished from premodern life as determined by social conventions. Historical research emphasises the varieties in family life chronologically but also geographically. It points out, for example, the relative autonomy of the nuclear family as typical for centuries already of north-western Europe. Since the seventeenth century in particular, the tendency to marry freely chosen partners at a later age can be seen. The popular idea that reproduction becomes a conscious choice only when having children is no longer economically necessary is also denied on the basis of historical data.[12]

Other research contradicts the common-sense assumption that a stronger state is automatically detrimental to family ties. It shows that – at least in Europe – kinship played a central role in the rise of the modern class society.[13] Case studies reveal that changes in the organisation and status of family are, rather, directly related to changes at the level of politics. Thus, family life has played a constructive role in times of political change, in particular in the formation of strong nation states in modernity. The historians Simon Teuscher and David Sabean demonstrate this in a periodisation that counters the simple contrast model of premodern versus modern. They distinguish between two major transitions in the

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[12] Fertig and Szołtysek, 'Fertilität', 183, 186–9.

[13] A recent historical study of kinship in Europe displays this general corrective thesis and uses concrete case studies to contradict the assumption that modernity is the history of the 'decline and contraction towards the modern nuclear family' (David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), x and passim). Fertig and Szołtysek refer to David Sabean's own historical case studies (1990, 1998) as an important example of the so-called Göttinger approach to historical demography, which was a pioneer in taking into account what actually happened inside the household, instead of regarding it as a 'black box' (Fertig and Szołtysek, 'Fertilität', 186).

shape of European family life up to 1900.[14] From the end of the Middle
Ages to the eighteenth century, an overall increase in the importance of
kinship relations in Europe can be seen in a vertical and hierarchical sense
as regards property, inheritance and succession (4–16). From the mid-
eighteenth century on, a second change follows that leads to a stronger
emphasis on horizontal family relations as emotional relations, which can
be seen, for example, in the increase of endogamy (16–24).[15] The latter
change parallels the rise of a new bourgeois wealth that was no longer
related to land or monopoly but based on direct money (17), and of the
coming into existence of a class society (22). The nineteenth century is called
'kinship-hot' in the sense that 'enormous energy was invested in maintaining
and developing extensive, reliable, and well-articulated structures of
exchange among connected families over many generations' (3).

   Teuscher and Sabean argue that the prevalent 'old story of the rise of
the nuclear family and the decline of the importance of kinship' is not
just historically incorrect and in that sense an 'innocent' misconception
(23). It is completely interwoven with current Western views of human
beings as autonomous individuals, 'cut loose from the responsibilities of
kin, and cut out for the heroic task of building the self-generating
economy'. As such, it has also influenced views of non-Western societies
as dominated, in contrast, by kinship relations. The latter are studied in
a specific discipline, not history but anthropology. Among anthropolo-
gists, however, this critique of contrastive kinship views as underlying
presupposed binary oppositions between 'the West and the rest' is found
as well. We will analyse these self-critical arguments in detail in
Chapter 3.[16] These debates have not just resulted in a methodological
renewal in kinship anthropology but also in an interest in how family or
kinship take shape in current Western societies, in particular under the
influence of new reproduction technology.

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[14] David Warren Sabean and Simon Teuscher, 'Kinship in Europe: A New Approach to Long-Term
     Development', in *Kinship in Europe*, ed. by Sabean, Teuscher, and Mathieu, 1–32, at 3.
[15] Fertig and Szołtysek argue that this phenomenon of marrying within the same social layer, or even
     the same family, only changes from the twentieth century onwards ('Fertilität', 189).
[16] Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell collect empirical research in anthropology to unmask the
     ideological character of the view of modernity as anti-familial. An original example of the current
     ambiguity regarding family to which they refer is the study of one's personal family history, supported by
     television series and popular books, which is pointed out as 'the fastest-growing hobby in the United
     States – and one of the most popular in Europe, Canada, Australia, and beyond' (Susan McKinnon and
     Fenella Cannell, eds., *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship* (Santa Fe, NM: School
     for Advanced Research Press, 2013), 8). Underlying these interests in family is, in their view, 'the feeling
     that modernity is a space in which kinship is constantly under threat of being lost' (11).

In the field of pedagogics, critical attention has likewise been drawn to the large, quasi-historical sketches of developments in the family that predominate in current family studies. In a recent German 'Handbook Family' Burkhard Fuhs concurs with earlier reflections by Karl Lenz and Lothar Böhnisch on the widespread ahistorical tendencies in family scholarship. They call for 'myth hunting' – a critical review of prevailing, emotionally charged 'myths of family imagination'.[17] Lenz and Böhnisch identify three such myths that originated in the nineteenth century parallel to the rise of family studies. These myths share with the aforementioned images the fact that they contrast present family life to that of former times. The contrast may be one of size: the family of the good old days was large – three or more generations – while the family of the present is small. Or the family of former days is seen as one of harmony versus present-day conflictual forms, which presupposes another scheme of gradual family deterioration.

A third myth concerns the continuity of the family through the ages as a community of feelings and emotions. These modern myths came into existence in the struggle of the industrialising societies to cope with developments of democratisation. They serve to underpin both conservative and progressive reactions to it. They offer a model (*Leitbild*) of family, rather than the actual historical situation. For example, the public discourse about the family in the twentieth century after the First World War is characterised by pessimism, worry and the plea to protect family life.[18]

A counter-narrative emerged with the rise of empirical qualitative and quantitative family research from the 1950s onwards. It emphasises that family does not gradually disappear in modernity but receives new functions and takes new shapes. In recent empirical family sociology, the optimistic counter-narrative may still be easily noticed. It can be seen in, for example, the tone of relief found in concluding sections of such studies or summaries for popular, non-academic media. Here family life is said to be 'alive and well'.[19]

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[17] Burkhard Fuhs, 'Zur Geschichte der Familie', in *Handbuch Familie*, ed. by Jutta Ecarius (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2007), 17–35, at 18; Karl Lenz and Lothar Böhnisch, 'Zugänge zu Familien – ein Grundlagentext', in *Familien: eine interdisziplinäre Einführung*, ed. by Lothar Böhnisch and Karl Lenz (Weinheim: Juventa, 1997), 9–63, at 11. For the concept of 'myth hunting' ('Mythenjagd'), Lenz and Böhnisch refer to Norbert Elias, who uses the concept to describe the central task of scientific research as such: unmasking myths as actually unfounded.

[18] Fuhs, 'Zur Geschichte der Familie', 20–1.

[19] For example, towards the end of the twentieth century, research into the topic of 'family solidarity' clearly showed an increasingly worried tone, combined with mostly reassuring conclusions that the current situation should not be described as one of 'solidarity lost' but as 'solidarity changed' (Petruschka Schaafsma, 'What Is at Stake in the Family? Ethical Reflections on Recent Sociological Research into the Family', in *Family: Kinship That Matters/ Familie: Verwandtschaft die den*

Relief, reassurance and a triumphant tone of having unmasked popular pessimistic views characterise these statements. They presuppose some controversy or polemic as lying behind and perhaps providing the reason for the studies – one, moreover, that is not devoid of moral overtones concerning the good of this fact that 'the family is alive'. But they do not engage in direct dialogue with opposing views, for example, those of Giddens or Bauman. Contrary to the critical, historically oriented meta-studies just mentioned, these empirical sociological investigations are not introduced as arising from such a controversy or as aiming to shed light on it. Rather, the main denominator of the reasons given for most family sociology may be formulated as mapping the changes in post-war family life.

Further support or justification of the need for this mapping does not seem to be required. It results in studies on a magnitude of topics related to family. As a result, empirical research into these changes of course provides information about current family life, but only in a fragmentary way. Although the term 'family' is mentioned in reassuring conclusions like the ones just provided, the relation between all these specific topics and the general theme of family is not the focus of this research. The same holds for much historical research. Investigations into the specific character of the family in different historical periods has opened the eyes to the synchronic variety. Factors concerning variety are not just size or composition but also the moral norms of family life. These differ at specific moments – for example, among different classes of society. As a result of this consideration of synchronic and diachronic diversity, however, speaking about family generally becomes less obvious.

The educationalist Fuhs nevertheless thinks empirical approaches can be of great value to family research, but he observes little reaction to it in current pedagogy (21). The theme of family is still usually discussed in terms of protecting the family from decline, which is in line with popular generalisations. The question of what the actual state of the family is, however, is not thoroughly investigated. Nor is the contrast with family life of the past, particularly in terms of a suggested loss of functions to the state, supported by factual references. Thus, here too a pessimistic view continues to prevail, despite empirical findings to the contrary. At the same time pedagogy holds family in high esteem and expects a lot from it for the purpose of education. According to Fuhs, this esteem remains 'theoretical' and 'detached from the family in practice' (32). This is partly

the result of the informal, spontaneous sphere of education that family embodies. Pedagogical aims of coming to grips with education are more easily achieved outside the sphere of the family.[20]

The Need for a Constructive, Fundamental Ethical Approach

We turned to this descriptive research on family because it criticised an all-too-easy paradigm of family decline in modernity. In this research, family is, contrary to the sociological accounts, not seen as something of the past. The great diversity of current and past family life comes into view. By means of detailed case studies and large overviews, the prevalence of pessimistic views about family and their protectionist consequences are denounced. These studies are thus very well aware of the controversial character of the topic of family. They aim to solve the controversy by referring to the facts. The research is descriptive in nature and focusses on empirical data from concrete case studies.

As a result, the analysis of the controversial status of family is not what the studies aim for. There are brief reflections on the reasons behind pessimistic views, but these are not carried out in a systematic way. For example, a reverse trend in more recent research on family resilience to the mood of relief goes unnoticed and unexplained. While the sociologists interpreted the controversial status of family as a result of the difficulty of giving shape to new ideals of love relationships, these empirical approaches explain it as arising out of myths. An analysis of the reasons behind this contrastive, mythical thinking is not what they aim for, however, and thus their contributions to understanding the current charged and controversial character of the family remain limited. Moreover, the attention paid to the great diversity in family as such stands in the way of speaking about family in general.

It is precisely at this point that our aims differ. What does it yield, we will ask, when we do take this charged character into account but regard it as an impulse to investigate constructively what is at stake in family? This approach can integrate insights from both streams of recent family research that we just analysed. It can account for the sociological understanding of family as a difficult phenomenon that does not easily square with dominant ideals of freely chosen intimate relationships. It does not, however, need to put this in

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[20] Fuhs refers to Rousseau's *Emile* as an important impulse to the Enlightenment theories about upbringing that isolate pupil and teacher from the family. The ideals behind these theories are influential up to now ('Zur Geschichte der Familie', 32).

terms of a grand narrative of contrast with family life of former times. It would, moreover, remain attentive to the dangers of speaking of family in general.

At the start of this study, the question of whether it is possible to inquire into what family could mean is an open one, given the diversity of family life in all times. In our view, the risk of overgeneralisation does not mean completely closing the door on any reflection on what family means. We see possibilities for an inquiry into 'family in general' by starting at points where family is a controversial topic, where it embodies or symbolises aspects of life that are difficult to take into account, those of givenness and dependence. It is at these points that the experiences of and speaking about family do in fact concern this general level, which is at the same time connected with a diversity of concrete situations.

The difficulties of dealing with the givenness of family and with being dependent on family members are experienced in different ways. The aforementioned sociological accounts may illuminate these 'confronting' experiences as resulting from the rise of a new religion-like faith in love, which makes certain aspects of family life difficult. The more historically oriented research and empirical studies criticised this view as too general and schematic to do justice to the diversity of family life. Our reflections on family will not approach the difficulty of family as solely the result of changing views of intimacy, nor does this approach take the line that this difficulty can be explained away by focussing on the particularity of current, diverse family life. The former does not leave enough room to study experiences that do not easily fit into the new paradigms of consciously agreed love. The latter does not aim to analyse the tension between family and prevailing ideals. A different, more fundamental way of dealing with the complexity of family in our time is needed. The themes of givenness and dependence will enable us to develop such an approach.

Our focus on givenness and dependence implies a normative perspective. Here, the ethical character of our study becomes explicit. In that sense, it is not surprising that the much more descriptive nature of the family research we analysed so far does not show complete affinity with our normative questions and interest. On the other hand, the analysis so far reveals that even in these more descriptive approaches normativity is not absent. The controversial nature of the topic of family is visible. This means it is all the more important to investigate what family might mean and its controversial character at a fundamental level. The next step in the elaboration of the specific approach of our study is therefore to relate it to current ethical family studies. Do we find there an interest in the charged status of family and a desire to reconsider

the phenomenon at a fundamental level in a self-critical but also constructive reflection on the difficult aspects it confronts us with in our time?

Family as a Moral Problem

Ethical reflection on family as found in philosophy gives the impression that it is a discipline itself, like family sociology or kinship anthropology. This reflection does not take the form of a 'family ethics' in a broad sense that would cover moral issues on all the family-related fields, ranging from work–family balance to gender issues or reproductive technology. Such topics are not absent from philosophical family accounts, but they are addressed through a specific lens, that of parenthood. Nevertheless, the general label 'family' is used for such reflections. 'Family ethics' is thus, even in many book titles, largely equated with the ethics of parenthood. In addressing the broad range of family-related topics with an eye to the well-being of parents and children, the latter perspective – that is, that of the children – has moreover been put forward recently as a corrective one. This should be an innovative starting point that frees reflection in this field from its earlier one-sided focus on the parental side.[21] This critical renewal does not do away with the fact that this ethics of parenthood focusses mostly on questions that are, in a sense, timeless or classic. In particular, they concern the issues of whether the enormous influence parents have on their children is in fact desirable, what the precise character of their unequal relationship is, and what parents and children owe each other.

Demarcating and Securing the Good Functions of Parenthood

Parent–child relationships are studied in ethics because they clearly imply moral dangers or risks. There are the risks of the inequality that is fostered by raising children in families. Family is here addressed as part of the given aspects of life that influence or determine people's socio-economic status, chances of development, physical and mental well-being and the like.

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[21] For example, philosophers Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift argue that liberal philosophy implies a view of human beings as adult agents and focusses on the protection of their freedom to act as they want to because this is crucial to human well-being. In this view, the specific character of children's positions and interests does not come into view. For Brighouse and Swift, this specificity lies in that children are dependent, vulnerable and have no grasp of what is good for them on the one hand but have the capacity to develop into 'nonvulnerable and independent adults' on the other (Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, *Family Values: The Ethics of Parent–Child Relationships* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 62).

John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, 1971) is often cited as the classic formulation of the principal conflict between growing up in a family and the fair equality of opportunity to participate in society to develop one's talents. Another group of risks concerns the power relations within the family. Parental influence might not leave room for the child to develop its own, unique personhood; parents may expect too much from the child in return for what they have given it, or they may abuse the child in mental or even physical ways.[22] These issues may also be addressed from a meta-perspective by analysing the nature and status of upbringing within the family in comparison to public education or by investigating what power the state may exercise in shaping its junior citizens and in protecting them, also against abuse within the family.

These moral issues of the precise nature and the risks of upbringing within the family have bothered philosophers from Plato on and may thus be called 'classic'.[23] As a result, the controversial character of the family is in these studies not primarily formulated as resulting from the post–World War II changes to family life in the Western context. The increased family diversity is addressed, also by means of concrete cases, but more in the sense of giving new urgency to the old question of what good relationships between parents and children might be. In dealing with all kinds of topical family issues, those of marriage and, in particular, the rise of non-marital partnerships and divorce are recurring themes. The general term 'family' occurs more frequently as a label or summarising title when the relations between parents and children are discussed and not so much in studies concerned with marriage.

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[22] Brighouse and Swift make a similar distinction between 'challenges which the family poses to any theory of justice'. The egalitarian challenge concerns compensating the inequality that exists between families, and the liberal challenge has to do with the issues of freedom and authority (*Family Values*, 2). The two challenges are explored in the first two chapters of the book and the aim of the study is to resolve the tension between taking into account equality and the freedom of individuals as much as possible (3).

[23] Plato is cited in much of the ethics literature as the first pronounced example of what we will call a suspicious approach to family, which was also a controversial view in his day (Penelope Murray, 'Tragedy, Women and the Family in Plato's *Republic*', in *Plato and the Poets*, ed. by Pierre Destrée and Fritz-Gregor Herrmann (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 175–93, at 177). In his reflections on the ideal state in Book V of the *Republic*, he points out that the upbringing of children in the family makes them focus on the interests and well-being of their fellow family members to the detriment of feeling responsible for the community at large. The unity among the citizens of the polis is moreover threatened by private fortune or sorrows and conflicts. The class of people charged with public tasks, the guardian rulers, should therefore not have wives of their own or care for their own children. The education of their children should be taken care of by the state, which would, moreover, raise them to become the responsible citizens they cannot become within the family. Penelope Murray points out that the abolition of the family in the *Republic* is entwined with the removal of tragic poetry from the educational programme because the 'very life blood' of tragedy is the depiction of 'familial strife' (192).

In spite of the classic character of the issues related to family understood as parenthood, the few examples of 'family ethics' published in recent decades present themselves as pioneering. A close look at these examples gives a good impression of what is characteristic of ethical reflection on family understood as parenthood. The much-cited *Parents and Children: The Ethics of the Family* from the 1980s by the ethicist Jeffrey Blustein formulates its pioneering aim as giving 'some philosophical respectability' to a 'long-neglected area of social philosophy'.[24] The first half of the book therefore consists in an overview of the forgotten history of Western philosophical thinking about family from Plato to Hegel.[25]

When Blustein points out the urgency of altering this negligence, the contrast between the modern and the pre-industrial family figures again. In modernity, family no longer 'limits one's life prospects' (4) in the sense that 'occupation and status' are transmitted from parent to child. For Blustein, the classic moral issues related to family have become more complicated in modernity because of their focus on the well-being and interests of the individual family members. How should parents equip their children with the capacities to autonomously choose their own life course and become who they want to be? How can they keep their own autonomy and authority while also fostering the autonomy of their children?

Blustein focusses the general modern attention on the autonomy of the individual on the child. He does not aim for a radical position on the autonomy or rights of children, but he does argue that parental rights and responsibility should be adjusted to the welfare of the child (10). He also formulates the threat of life in a family to the well-being of the child in terms of inequality and social justice. Children have unequal chances in part because of their upbringing in a specific family. Here we see the aspect of the givenness of family return, in the sense of shaping children's socio-economic starting positions in life. It seems obvious that inequalities as a result of this should be compensated for by partly organising education in a kind of 'common upbringing' (14). What should be the balance, though, between private and public child-rearing? This returning question reveals that family is here approached somewhat suspiciously as a way of life that is to be evaluated as to its contribution to the well-being of the individual members, in particular the children. Moreover, this suspicion is seen as the critical contribution of the ethical perspective, which is highly

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[24] Jeffrey Blustein, *Parents and Children: The Ethics of the Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 15.
[25] According to Blustein, after Hegel, the relationship between parents and children became a 'sideline' in systematic ethical reflection (*Parents and Children*, 95).

necessary because of the widespread self-evident commitment to family as the best place for child-rearing.

Blustein aims to contribute to this critical evaluation of the value of family by focussing on what good parenthood is. He does so by prioritising the duties of parents over their rights. This focus on duties reveals that, for him, parenthood is not so much something to be protected but rather to be stimulated as to its true functions, which confirms that his basic attitude towards family is a somewhat suspicious one. Ethics should outline the parental duties that follow from the needs of the child because parents do not automatically fulfil their children's interests. The core duties of parenthood are specified as not just raising the child to autonomy but also as fostering its health and respecting it as a unique individual.

The issue of the functions of good parenthood is first investigated without taking into account the concrete shape families may take. The question of who the parents raising children should be is dealt with in the second instance so that the function becomes the criterion for the form of the family. It is clear that given this function, social conventions that take family to be a biological relationship are not prima facie convincing. Why should biological parents be better able to develop the self-respect and autonomy of their children? A justification of the best ways of raising children should be built on showing how it contributes to the well-being of all involved, including the larger community. Empirical 'observation and experiment' are central to this justification (160).

Blustein focusses not only on the moral duties of the parent but also on those of the child. This theme of 'filial duties' is also presented as a classic one in ethical reflection on parent–child relationships. Duties are at stake on the part of children as well, although in a very different way than in the case of parents because children develop from completely dependent beings to conscious moral actors. Their duties differ across the stages of their development. A distinction is made between duties of owing and of friendship. The first involve indebtedness and gratitude and are expressed in an attitude of respect, while friendship implies a more consciously chosen affective relationship associated in particular with adulthood. In dealing with these classic distinctions between different kinds of filial duties, the suspicious ethical attitude is not prominent. Blustein takes the filial duties as an indisputable fact. The difficult task of ethics is, of course, to determine the content and limits of these duties. Family may ask too much of children. Here the danger of the abuse of parental power within the family is again an issue.

The suspicion returns in the third part of the study where the issue of social injustice in relation to family policy is the focus. Why, Blustein asks, is the commitment to the family as the primary setting of child-rearing so strong when it leads to so much inequality? Again, empirical data from psychology are important for answering this question. These data show that, for healthy emotional development, upbringing by parents is crucial. To such insights, ethics adds a fundamental reflection on the views of 'health' and thus of personhood and being human involved in this psychological perspective.

Blustein emphasises in his reflection the importance of exclusive and intimate relationships for developing self-respect and being able to establish deep and loving relationships oneself. Moreover, raising children in such exclusive and enduring relationships creates moral diversity: families vary in their ideas of the good and ideals. This variety is morally beneficial for families, individuals and society at large. The moral importance of variety does not mean that the increasingly diverse forms of family life are all morally equal. The issue of whether marriage has a special value is also discussed in relation to the interests of the child. The enduring character of relationships is seen as the heart of the good of the family, specified as sharing a common history, experiences that enrich the 'deep ties of companionship and love' (249) and the opportunity to be involved in an ongoing process of attaining self-knowledge, also in the contacts between parents and adult children. Of course, institutions like marriage cannot guarantee this, but they do support enduring family ties. A case is made for a policy that links parenthood and marriage because this institutional support of enduring relationships is clearly more beneficial to children.

Blustein's pioneering ethics of the family thus turns out to pick up on classic issues that centre around the value of parents raising children – that is, in a family setting. These are moral issues because this upbringing clearly has drawbacks that are reasons to be suspicious about family, in particular because its good is largely considered self-evident. Families are enclosed mini-communities with their own values and ideals, a sphere that cannot be easily controlled. Moreover, family members privilege each other. Family determines one's starting position in life also in a socio-economic sense.

Modernity has specified and intensified this classic issue as the tension between being a community and taking into account the autonomy of individuals, which is further illuminated by psychological and pedagogical insights. Theories of basic rights and duties are invoked to determine the degree of autonomy of family members, and the balance between family and the public sphere of the state. The controversial

nature of family is therefore not as topical in this ethical approach as it is in the sociological accounts. There the issue was the suggested fragmentation or disappearance of family due to a changed focus on the value of chosen, intimate love relationships. In Blustein's ethics the modern importance of the value of intimacy and love is rather presupposed. It is not perceived as problematic for the family; family life can be attuned to it.

In a similar unproblematic way, the current diversity of family life is presupposed. This diversity leads to questions as to whether all family forms are morally equal, but it does not as such make family into a controversial phenomenon. What is more, family is self-evidently understood as characterised by enduring and exclusive relationships. While these are clearly aspects that can be associated with givenness, this givenness does not become a problem. Endurance and exclusivity are thought to be compatible with intimate love. Together, these aspects are crucial to self-formation and autonomy. Despite the fundamental suspicion, a morally non-controversial, acceptable family is thus conceivable, although it may be hard to realise in practice. Ethics outlines the criteria for a good family and stimulates critical moral reflection on the specific value of family in child-rearing and the balance between private and public upbringing.

Another study that is presented as pioneering is the 'first family ethics anthology' in 1999 edited by Laurence D. Houlgate.[26] The texts collected in this volume are mostly contemporary with a few historical examples ranging from the classic opposition between Plato and Aristotle on the value of family to that between Hobbes and Locke and the communist views of Friedrich Engels. More than in Blustein's book, the starting point of the anthology is formulated in terms of the current controversial status of family and implies speaking about family in a more general sense instead of focussing only on parents and children. The controversial nature of family is understood as the result of the increased diversity of family life since the 1960s.

Disagreement is said to be unavoidable in current reflection on family because advocates of the traditional family and those of a diversity of family forms are on opposite sides. What is the role of ethics in dealing with this opposition? The suggestion that disagreement can be resolved by giving

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[26] Laurence D. Houlgate, *Morals, Marriage, and Parenthood: An Introduction to Family Ethics* (London: Wadsworth, 1999). The main reasons mentioned for the publication of this book are the recent 'excellent writing on the problems of family ethics' and the need to present these as part of a 'new subfield of applied ethics', one that 'stands on its own', like medical or business ethics (x).

a clear definition of family is briefly explored but soon dismissed. Such a definition will always exclude some forms that are nevertheless recognised in practice as a form of family or become so open that it no longer expresses the distinct character of family relationships. In fact, however, the traditional type of family often functions as a reference point in relation to which other forms are viewed as 'more or less family'.[27] This variety of 'more or less' is briefly illustrated by a selection of texts from historical and cultural research. The moral question that is central to the main part of the anthology turns out, however, to be not that of the form family takes but of its functions and value. As in Blustein's approach, this focus on functions leads to an openness to different forms. The current controversy on what constitutes a true family is thus solved by an ethical reflection on the functions of family. The functions centre on respecting the individual in a loving, intimate relationship.

A similar approach is visible in the texts that are subsequently presented to illuminate the family-related topics of marriage and parenthood. Like family, marriage is introduced as a topic that should be reflected on given the increasing variety of partner relationships. The ethical evaluation of this variety again focusses on function. Special attention is therefore also given to dysfunction as a result of the patriarchal character of marriage and family roles, divorce and family violence. Here the suspicion, which is also visible in Blustein's approach, becomes apparent. While Blustein sees this as a reason to start from parental duties instead of rights, Houlgate selects texts on both.

These issues are usually not discussed from a contemporary perspective but presented as self-evident, classic ones. Do parents have a right to privacy and non-interference by the state in child-rearing, which includes raising children according to their ideals? Are there limits to this right? Or should the focus be on parental duties to raise children so they acquire morally right beliefs? The issue of parental rights is also discussed at a more fundamental level, which does have a contemporary emphasis: given that people can choose not to have children by using contraceptives, is having children a moral issue? Or is it something 'natural'? Both arguments could lead to the view that having children is a field in which no outsiders can judge, let alone interfere, as well as to putting limits on this freedom because there are cases of 'unnatural' conception or of not having the rational or other capabilities basic to be respected as owners of rights. These

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[27] This view is presented by the sociologist William J. Goode in the text 'Defining the Family: A Matter of More or Less', in Houlgate, *Morals, Marriage, and Parenthood*, 27–30.

questions arise in particular in cases in which outsiders are somehow involved, as in the case of abortion for medical or other reasons or the extreme example of having a child to enable medical treatment of a sibling.[28] Finally, the rights of parents are related to the liberty of children and filial duties. As in Blustein's approach, the latter issue is presented as a classic one, without any references to the contemporary situation.

The first impression of family ethics as being or having become a distinct field of research, which elaborates in particular on the value of parent–child relationships in reflecting on classic questions, becomes even stronger in twenty-first-century publications. General volumes that aim for a 'family ethics' are still hardly found, but ethical publications abound on the classic issues mentioned. Usually, the studies are no longer emphatically presented as pioneering.[29] As in Houlgate's anthology, the topicality of the established moral issues does emerge in that many publications discuss the increased diversity of partner relations and family forms and the ideological divides in the evaluation of this diversity.[30] The scope of these changes and

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[28] This real-life case is analysed in the volume by the philosopher Nancy Jecker, 'Conceiving a Child to Save a Child: Reproductive and Filial Ethics', in Houlgate, *Morals, Marriage, and Parenthood*, 206–11.

[29] For example, two general overviews of family and parenthood ethics from the past two decades do not mention any specific contemporary reasons for their volumes in their introductions. A 2010 edited volume starts from the couple and then broadens to parents and children, the relationship to the larger community, law, welfare and new, birth-related technology (Stephen Scales, Adam Potthast and Linda Oravecz, eds., *The Ethics of the Family* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010)). A new book series on 'family rights' opens with an anthology on parenthood with articles from 1990 to 2014 from both philosophy and law (Stephen Gilmore, *Parental Rights and Responsibilities*, Library of Essays on Family Rights (London: Routledge 2017)). On the other hand, a recent volume with reactions on the aforementioned 2014 parenthood ethics by Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (*Family Values*) does call the interest in the field of political philosophy on the 'micro level' of familial justice a recent one (Andrée-Anne Cormier and Christine Sypnowich, eds., 'Special Issue on *Family Values* by H. Brighouse and A. Swift', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 21/ 3 (2018): 279–405, at 279). The topics of this special issue are clearly classic – for example, the issue of family and inequality and the advantages of public education, the autonomy of parents versus the independence of children, or the right to parent as distinct from the right to procreate. Brighouse and Swift themselves indicate the topicality of their study is a broader exploration of the 'normative aspects of family' than the ones given in family studies so far; the latter originated mainly from a feminist background and focussed on the injustice of gender relationships within families or on their practices of care (Brighouse and Swift, *Family Values*, XIII–XV). The complete equation of family and parenting can be clearly seen in their description of the second part of the book, which 'seeks to justify the family – to explain why it is good that children be raised by parents' (48). This focus is specified as the question of 'whether there should be "parents" at all', followed by that of '*which* adults should parent *which* children' (49). Linda C. McClain and Daniel Cere explain the reasons behind their volume on family as a correction to the excessive attention paid to the theme of marriage in family studies (*What Is Parenthood? Contemporary Debates about the Family* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 1). As a result of this limited focus on marriage, the underlying assumptions regarding parenthood remain out of sight while they do play a crucial role in the views of marriage.

[30] An example of such interest in family ideologies is the arrangement of the contributions in the volume by McClain and Cere, which is determined by placing an advocate of a more traditional,

their influence on the well-being of family members are often discussed by referring to specific social scientific studies on these topics.[31] Of course, empirical data are judged differently or different data are highlighted, which leads to different ethical conclusions.[32] The role of policy and law in discouraging or stimulating certain parental practices, in particular by giving privileges to either marriage or to other legally recognised partner relations, is much discussed in ethics as well, as is the role and value of family in society.[33] Family ethics with its focus on the parent–child

heterosexual family (integrative model) beside a defender of a diversity model. The first focusses on form, the second on function. The tension between the two models is identified as present in academia but also in 'public opinion' (*What Is Parenthood?*, 4).

[31] A book that explicitly aims to develop perspectives on family law and policy based on social scientific data is a volume with a variety of different views on family edited by Elizabeth S. Scott and Marsha Garrison. They present 'empirically grounded analysis' as offering a 'neutral lens that, by enhancing understanding, may sometimes even produce a consensus across ideological divides' (*Marriage at the Crossroads: Law, Policy, and the Brave New World of Twenty-First-Century Families* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3).

[32] A good example of oppositions among views that refer to their own selection of empirical data on the well-being of family members, in particular that of children, are two parts of the volume on the meaning of parenthood by McClain and Cere (*What Is Parenthood?*). Part IV concerns the question of which family model yields the best outcomes for children and society. The legal scholar Margaret F. Brinig points to empirical data on children's well-being that show they do better when growing up in legally recognised family relations. On this basis she opposes current tendencies to dismantle 'the legal protections given to marriage and biological or adoptive parenting' (Margaret F. Brinig, 'A Case for Integrated Parenthood', in McClain and Cere, *What Is Parenthood?*, 147–70, at 167). Psychologist Fiona Tasker, on the other hand, uses empirical data to show that 'family type per se makes little difference to children's well-being' (Fiona Tasker, 'Developmental Outcomes for Children Raised by Lesbian and Gay Parents', in McClain and Cere, *What Is Parenthood?*, 171–90, at 184–5). Part V (193–236) similarly shows how empirical data can be used to support and oppose the idea that the secure attachment of children to their parents or caregivers has biological bases and evolutionary functions. As regards the role of marriage in creating stable relationships, Garrison and Scott's position is nuanced ('Legal Regulation of Twenty-First-Century Families', in Scott and Garrison, *Marriage at the Crossroads*, 303–25). They acknowledge that social science shows that children benefit from being raised in a marriage-based family. As a result, the class divide between wealthier and poorer families continues to grow. They emphasise this does not mean that law and policy should continue the privileges of marriage or even increase them – it may very well be that people inclined to a less stable love life already avoid getting married. Forcing them into marriage would not create stability but conflict marriages or multiple marriages, which are in fact indicators for a decrease in the well-being of children (321).

[33] A good example of this focus is the work of Margaret F. Brinig on family, which combines law and social science perspectives. She argues that an understanding of family relations in terms of covenant relationships instead of contracts should inform family law in order to support good family ties characterised by permanence and unconditional love (*From Contract to Covenant: Beyond the Law and Economics of the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Unlike a contract, a covenant reveals that a relationship continues to exist even when legal ties are no longer present, as in the case of adult children and their parents, or of divorce (7). A covenant implies a stronger kind of trust than a contract because the latter presupposes the possibility of breaking off the relationship (Margaret F. Brinig and Steven Nock, 'Covenant and Contract', *Regent University Law Review* 12/9 (1999): 9–26, at 26). Brinig emphasises that trust is not only a private issue of the family members themselves but exists and grows in interaction with the place of the family in the larger community

relations turns out to have become a broad, interdisciplinary field in which experts on family law, psychologists, sociologists and educationalists, philosophers, political scientists and sometimes also experts in religion collaborate. The different disciplines are presented as needing each other to deal with the issues of good parent–child relations.[34]

To determine the value of parenthood the ethical perspective is often first widened beyond the sphere of the family to general questions of what interests are fundamental to being human and thus of what well-being means.[35] Subsequently, this quest for fundamental interests is specified in relation to the interests or goods characteristic of children and then to those of parents and of partners or spouses.[36] Among the interests, the good of being respected in one's unique individuality is often related to the family

(cf. in particular: *Family, Law, and Community: Supporting the Covenant* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010)). The legal institution of marriage or child custody is a community's recognition of the trustworthiness of the relationship of the couple, or of parent and child. This recognition stimulates trust among the family members. Children learn to trust by imitating their parents. The community's trust in the family and the family members' trust in each other are thus tightly interlocked. Trust is also at stake in the balance between family autonomy and state involvement.

[34] This need for interdisciplinarity in family research is also visible in the existence of a society for family research founded in the United States already in 1938, the National Council on Family Relations, which describes itself as 'the premier professional association for understanding families through interdisciplinary research, theory, and practice' and in the explicitly interdisciplinary scope of one of its journals (from 1951 onwards), *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies* (www.ncfr.org).

[35] For example, Michael W. Austin (*Conceptions of Parenthood: Ethics and the Family* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)) takes certain 'fundamental interests of both parents and children' as the basis for a 'moderate view' of parental rights (76). These interests include 'psychological well-being, intimate relationships, and the freedom to pursue that which brings satisfaction and meaning to life'. To underpin the fundamental character of these interests, Austin refers to common-sense arguments like the value we attach to privacy and the simple observation that people are unhappy when they lack one or more of these goods and, on the other hand, make great efforts to obtain them (79–80). Rights of non-interference protect the precondition for the satisfaction of these interests (81–2). Brighouse and Swift start their reflection on children's interests in being parented with a discussion of Martha Nussbaum's more elaborate list of general interests of adults which also include aspects like having emotions, experiencing affinity with human and other beings, play and so forth (*Family Values*, 60).

[36] Brighouse and Swift distinguish between the interests of children and parents on the one hand and '(familial) relationship goods' on the other. The latter identify the specific character of what a family contributes to human well-being or happiness (*Family Values*, especially Part Two, 'Justifying the Family'). This includes the good experienced between parents and young children and the pedagogical good of laying the foundations for the ability to form 'healthy and happy relationships as adults' (xiii). In the elaboration of the 'relationship goods', the authors develop a '"dual interest" theory' which is concerned first of all with the interests of children but also with those of adults (51, 59). Basic human interests are defined as twofold: those that enable 'well-being or flourishing' and those that contribute to feeling respected as able to judge and choose, 'even where that respect does not make her life go better' (52). A deeper understanding of the specific interests of children and parents is necessary to answer the book's central questions of why children should be raised by parents and what parental rights are.

in particular, something that may also be indicated by the term 'love'.[37] Implied in the special kind of family love are the aforementioned aspects of intimacy and durability, which, in the case of child-rearing, mean knowing the child well and having time and capacities for care and upbringing. This parental love needs to be intrinsically motivated or spontaneous. To underpin the indispensability of this love one often finds references to empirical research from social or neuroscience.[38] An alternative to the language of love, which is usually coloured by a psychological background, is the notion of 'stewardship' as used in environmental ethics.[39] Like in the approaches of Blustein and Houlgate, understanding the function and value of family as rearing children in a setting of exclusive, enduring love implies a criterion for the form of family, a quite open one. Whenever adults care durably and with love for children, they may be called parents.[40]

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[37] The philosopher Laurence Thomas integrates both aspects in a view of family and its relations to society as a whole, in particular in shaping human morality (*The Family and the Political Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)). He argues that the development of moral qualities comes from being recognised and loved as a unique human being by one's parents, as this is the basis for experiencing oneself as a moral being. Psychological knowledge on the importance of constancy in parental love is indispensable to this argument. Love is not enough for good parenting, however; it also requires a sense of what is right and knowledge relevant to parenting. In combining these aspects, family serves as a model for how people should relate to others in society at large. Relationships between citizens cannot be based on equal rights alone but need the parallel of parental love in the form of general goodwill or fellow feeling – that is, the motivation to act justly even if acting unjustly would not lead to punishment (96). This view of family and society presupposes a view of human beings as not self-interested but altruistic – that is, prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of others. The fact that, universally, people want to have children reveals that they are altruistic – an idea that, according to Thomas, is a corrective to contemporary political thought (9). Michael McFall also emphasises the central role of parental love and the resulting self-respect for becoming moral human beings and refers to Laurence Thomas as his source (Michael T. McFall, *Licensing Parents. Family, State, and Child Maltreatment* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 27n43).

[38] Brighouse and Swift specify the core function of parenting as that of at least one single person who loves the children 'consistently over the course of their childhood', and they also refer to neuroscience to underpin this view (*Family Values*, 72).

[39] Michael Austin argues in favour of understanding parenthood as stewardship. As stewards, parents temporarily care for something precious which is not their property: their young children's lives. They raise their children to eventually become autonomous stewards of their own lives. The stewardship should fulfil as many interests of those involved as possible, that is, not just of children and parent, but also of society at large and future generations (*Conceptions of Parenthood*, 59). This means Austin has an emphatically broader scope than, for example, Brighouse and Swift, who regard a separate chapter on 'third parties' apart from children and parents a 'distraction' (*Family Values*, 51).

[40] This is the core of the answer Brighouse and Swift give to their basic question 'Does it take *a family – a parent –* to raise a child?' (*Family Values*, 70): children should be raised by a 'small number of particular adults' in 'intimate and authoritative' relationships and with 'considerable discretion' on the part of the adults (xii, 72). It is this constellation that they characterise, on the one hand, as 'rather similar' to the conventional family and, on the other, as limited in the discretion and acting

Towards a Different Way of Dealing with the Charged Status of Family

This brief overview of ethical approaches to family reveals that the starting point is mostly not the general question of what characterises a family. The central issue is what children, parents and partners need and whether and how these needs can be satisfied in the family setting. This approach to family is an ambiguous one. The fact that the question is posed of whether the family can fulfil the interests of its members betrays a suspicion.[41] The tension between being raised in families and having equal opportunities is obvious, as is the abuse families may cause. Ethics should remind us of these drawbacks against the common trust in family, especially in the sense of biological relationships. In this sense, family is approached as a controversial topic and has a charged status; its seemingly obvious value is questioned. On the other hand, the classic suspicion of family hardly seems to lead to radical abolitionist positions. Rather, the ethical analyses conclude with formulations of the specific value of the family. Subsequently, the issue is dealt with of how the distinct function of family can be stimulated or, better, ensured and protected. Duties and rights are the classic ethical ways to elaborate on this stimulating, ensuring and protection. The formulations of specific duties and rights correspond to the foregoing discussions of fundamental human interests, which include the desire for procreation and parenting as such. The issue of the protection of the family concerns reflection on

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of the parents towards their children and without a 'fundamental right to parent their own biological children' (xii). A comparable mix of convention and openness to newer forms is visible in Michael McFall's argument for the 'neo-nuclear family'. McFall defines it as 'slightly different' from the 'traditional nuclear family' in that it leaves open the sex of the married couple and requires both of them to be 'individuals with a sense of justice' (ISJ), for which a deep sense of self-respect is indispensable. This notion of self-respect is just as necessary for a stable and just society; it minimises 'distrust, envy, or resentment' (*Licensing Parents*, 13). By taking these aspects into account, McFall aims to engage with the problems of the complicated psychological nature of human beings. In his view, these problems are left unanswered in John Rawls' influential theory of a just society because he does not take self-respect as central to raising children in families but regards it as originating from the 'public affirmation of rights and liberties' (21).

[41] The suspicion is most obvious in views that argue in favour of licensing parents to perform their educational tasks. In a classic article Hugh LaFollette defends licensing parents as theoretically justified to protect children, who should be regarded as moral beings ('Licensing Parents', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9/2 (1980): 182–97). He proposes this view over against the idea of parental dominion over their biological children as something natural, following from being their parents' property. In a more recent article he restates his argument and advocates 'a moderate form of licensing' in practice, despite the complexity and risks of such a 'limited licensing program' ('Licensing Parents Revisited', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 27/4 (2010): 327–43, at 341). Here, his main argument is based on paralleling parents with professionals who serve highly vulnerable people – a situation we regulate by requiring licensed professionals. Michael McFall also pleads for licensing by means of a minimal system for which he elaborates the conditions (*Licensing Parents*, chapter 5).

non-interference from outside the family, related to rights on more specific practical issues ranging from home schooling, or knowing one's biological parents, to support for parents by adult children.

The elaboration of the ethical analysis of family in terms of rights and duties of parents, children and partners is classic but not undisputed. Critics claim that the language of rights and duties does not figure in everyday family life. Family is the context in which the issues of 'what I get and what I am due do not loom large'.[42] Houlgate illustrates this briefly by referring to a situation in which he would be asked to donate a kidney for his seriously ill sister. 'Even if I should concede that she has no such right, I would still be left wondering whether I ought to proceed with the donation'.[43] The proper moral character of family is not captured in terms of rights but in terms of love, care and intimacy. The authority of parents should be natural, just as their love for each other is spontaneous; this cannot be enforced on the basis of rights or duties. Such a rights or duties approach easily creates an opposition between individual family members who may insist on their right to have their interests satisfied. This criticism is anticipated in many of the ethical analyses of parenthood analysed earlier but not regarded as decisive.[44] That is again because there is reason to be suspicious. Parents do not always spontaneously and lovingly fulfil all the needs of their children or aim for their well-being and sometimes simply do not know what to do.[45] Reflection on duties and

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[42] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 33.

[43] Houlgate, *Morals, Marriage, and Parenthood*, 8.

[44] This debate on the appropriateness of the ethical categories of interests, duties, and rights has parallels in the debate of so-called communitarianism against 'liberalism' as well as in the corrective movement of virtue ethics and very prominently in different feminist critiques of mainstream philosophy, among them 'care ethics' (see also Chapter 4). In these approaches family is sometimes taken as the pre-eminent example that shows that morality is mostly about acting spontaneously on the basis of sentiments that are proper to a certain practice. This conception of morality as the result of sentiment and convention is contrasted with that of purely individual rational consideration. The classic reference for this is Hume, which has led to what is sometimes called a 'Humean ethics' as an alternative to deontology or utilitarianism and building on virtue ethics (e.g., Tom L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2001), chapter 7). Hume's famous example of family morality is that of the mother who sacrifices herself in order to care for her dying child. This way of acting is debatable in theoretical reflection, but its self-evidence in practice is undeniable. Hume mentions this example in a refutation of the account of morality by, most importantly, Hobbes and Locke, as being secretly motivated by self-love and self-interest ('Appendix II. Of Self-love', in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*). Beauchamp refers to Annette Baier in particular as taking up Hume's attention to family as giving insight into how morality is learned and operates (247–55).

[45] For example, Blustein, *Parents and Children*, 103–4; Brighouse and Swift, *Family Values*, 17–21. A classic version of the defence of rights as not constituting relationships but as a fallback 'if affection fades' is that by Jeremy Waldron ('When Justice Replaces Affection: The Need for Rights', *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 11/3 (1988): 625–41). Christina Hoff Sommers criticises the

rights is central to clarifying the point at which outsiders may inter-
vene. Moreover, it is possible to identify the specific way rights are at
stake in the context of the family. Thus, Houlgate emphasises that, in
this context, rights do not follow from voluntary agreements, tacit
promises or other acts in the past but are based on the mere fact of
being family members.[46] In each situation, one must decide whether
family obligations are crucial.

   We entered the field of ethical research on family by looking for
investigations of what family might mean and of its controversial,
charged status that do not regard family as something of the past nor
as too diverse to allow speaking about it in general. These views were
dominant in the sociological and the more empirical and historical
approaches to family analysed earlier. As a result, these approaches
were not interested in family as a phenomenon that should be recon-
sidered at a fundamental level with an eye to its charged status, as we aim to
do. In ethical reflection on family, on the other hand, there is definitely an
interest in family in general. Moreover, our terms 'givenness' and 'depend-
ence' may also be said to resonate with aspects of these ethical studies.
Families are approached as morally problematic because they foster inequal-
ity and are a hindrance to justice. They preserve bad socio-economic
situations and favour their members over others – aspects which may be
related to givenness. Their closed character and unequal power relations,
which imply dependence, make families susceptible to abuse. Family thus
also has a charged status in this research. Yet the ways in which this charged
status is defined and elaborated differ from our approach in many important
respects.

'sentimentalist tendency' she observes in especially feminist criticisms of rights- and duties-based
ethics and argues in favour of keeping the formal duties approach but attuning it to 'filial duties'.
These are related to the – indeed largely spontaneous – moral practices of family and thus not to be
formulated in any general sense beyond this context ('Filial Morality', *Journal of Philosophy* 83/8
(1986): 439–56, at 448ff.). Showing similar attention to the value of the formal or juridical
approaches are arguments for marriage as a contract against overly romantic views (e.g., Kathryn
Norlock, who refers to Immanuel Kant and Claudia Card as protagonists of marriage as
a sociopolitical institution, 'Teaching "Against Marriage", or, "But Professor, Marriage Isn't
a Contract!"', in Scales, Potthast and Oravecz, *Ethics of the Family*, 121–32).

[46] Houlgate, *Morals, Marriage, and Parenthood*, 13. Houlgate refers to W. D. Ross' theory from the
1930s as an example of promoting *prima facie* duties that follow from being in a morally significant
relationship with someone (14). In the case of family, this moral significance is then based on the
'neutral facts about the biological relationship' (16). Houlgate does not regard this as convincing
simply because it is easy to think of situations in which acting on such biological relations is not
morally beneficent. Therefore, Houlgate subsequently takes into account utilitarian approaches as
necessary to explain why in special situations the principle of family beneficence should be
violated (19).

In the ethical approaches we analysed, the charged status is not a contemporary one but much more classic and obvious, one for all ages, although it increases with the growing importance of the individual in modernity. The suspicion of family is formulated explicitly. It is a result of the obvious tension between being a family and the well-being of the individual or the common good of society. The task of ethical reflection is largely determined by the dangers following from this tension. Ethical reflection investigates what the value of family is, given its drawbacks, and what duties and rights follow from this value for family members. All approaches analysed earlier conclude that such a specific value exists and that the dangers related to the community of the family can be overcome, though not in any simple sense of some definite, overall good state of being family. However, ethical reflection on the specific goods of living in partner and parent–child relationships is seen as of help in improving family life. Moreover, it should help to overcome ideological divides concerning the value of family. Understanding the good functions of family should contribute to solving disagreements on its desired forms, in particular battles with strong advocates of some traditional family standard.

The aim of our study is also to alleviate the charged status of the topic of family. However, we do not think the difficulties of its givenness and dependence are so obvious and explicit. Therefore, understanding what family is about, especially as regards these aspects, becomes a different kind of project. We do not expect that an awareness of the dangers of inequality and power abuse, and the fight against them by means of the formulation of the value of family and of the duties and rights in line with it, is enough to understand and overcome the controversial character of family in our time. A different approach is necessary in which there is fundamentally more room to explore the specific character of family.

When the focus is on the functions from the outset, in particular those of creating stable relations for living together and raising children, family is approached within a framework that might not allow for discovering what may be called its own meaning or logic. For example, the question of what kind of 'stability' is found in the family is not prominent in the ethical approaches. It is obvious – one that serves the well-being of the members. Psychological expertise is called upon to specify this well-being as being loved as unique individuals and respected in their autonomy, which is a developing aspect in the case of children.

What seems crucial but is not discussed is that this stability is not first of all lived as a conscious project created to attain well-being but as specific kinds of relations in which one finds oneself, interwoven in a web of

relations. We will ask how this experience of givenness and dependence colours the specific character of these relationships. This means we will focus more on the distinct nature of the community of the family in general, as a broad network of relations extending to the past and the future, and resist translating it immediately into current partner and parent–child relations. It means that we leave the meanings more open and remain at a more fundamental level instead of choosing a particular, concrete angle like raising children.

That we do not leave the focus entirely open but choose to gain access by means of the lenses of givenness and dependence is not inconsistent with this fundamental approach. We choose these lenses to integrate a first, tentative and therefore still open analysis of our time and context in our approach and not as a complete explanation of the present controversial character of family. On the contrary, we will use them in a way that aims to account for the second, fundamental difficulty of formulating what family might mean, the difficulty we opened with in the Prologue. It is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to formulate what family is about in a straightforward sense. *Housekeeping* evoked a feeling for this meaning, precisely by not pinning it down.

Givenness and dependence will guide further exploration of the difficulty of naming what family might mean but also of the possibility of constructively 'evoking' such meanings. The idea of 'evoking' meanings is taken from the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel. It is inseparable from another key term in his thinking, which he also uses to reflect on family, that of 'mystery'. In the next section we will analyse his approach and explore its value for our project of finding a mode of ethical reflection that can account for the difficulty of naming what family might mean.

Marcel: Approaching Family as Mystery

Gabriel Marcel uses the term 'mystery' to indicate an alternative to common approaches to the topic of family. In two lectures dating from 1942 and 1943, given at the Ecole des hautes études familiales at Lyon and Toulouse, he opens by distinguishing mystery from problem.[47] He introduces this distinction as central to his philosophy in general (*Homo Viator*, 62). Problems are topics

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[47] We will refer to the context of Vichy France for these lectures in what follows. The lectures were published in the later collection of articles *Homo Viator* (Paris: Aubier 1944); we will refer to the English translations by Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton, 'The Mystery of the Family' and 'The Creative Vow as Essence of Fatherhood', in *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, Gabriel Marcel (South Bend, IN: Graham, 2010), 62–117. Already before the Second World War,

that are clearly demarcated by the thinking subject as objects for reflection. They are discussed with the aim of solving them, and the solutions are expected to be generally acceptable, based on common or factual knowledge. The personal involvement in the problem by the researcher or the one who takes notice of the reflection is irrelevant. A problem is approached in an objective way aiming for objective or conceptual knowledge.

A mystery, on the other hand, indicates a subject whose elucidation requires a different kind of reflection in which this personal involvement is crucial. Mysteries cannot be analysed from outside, as if they are objects. The central mystery of philosophy is 'being itself', which cannot be approached without taking one's own experience of the topic, one's own involvement in it into account. In a similar sense, family is a mystery in which one is 'effectively and vitally involved' (63). One cannot place it over against oneself as a topic to be analysed apart from oneself. In Marcel's view, when dealing with family, philosophy touches the heart of our existence and thus something that is 'too close and too far away' to be examined by thought directly, to be solved and become part of our objective knowledge (64).

Mystery as an Alternative to Problem

In his Gifford Lectures of 1949–50 Marcel also pays attention to family as mystery and quotes a passage on the distinction between mystery and problem from his earlier work.[48] Here he emphasises that the mysterious should not be confused with the 'unknowable' (*The Mystery of Being*, 212). This latter category still belongs to thinking in the mode of the problem; it is its 'limiting case'. A mystery, on the other hand, is therefore a 'positive act' insofar as it is something that should be recognised. The quotes end by relating mystery to intuition and experience as well as to acting. Intuition cannot be grasped in the sense of knowledge, but it does inspire one to act.

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family was a topic of interest among French thinkers dedicated to personalism. Marcel belonged to this group, along with philosophers like Emmanuel Mounier (1905–50), Gabriel Madinier (1895–1958) and Jean Lacroix (1900–86) to whom we will return in Chapter 4. For an analysis of the personalist views on family, which are not uniform, see Pierre Bréchon, *La famille. Idées traditionnelles et idées nouvelles* (Paris: Les Éditions le Centurion, 1976, 149–86, https://bit.ly/3ZwCbSP).

[48] Marcel goes into family as mystery in 'Presence As a Mystery', the final chapter of the first volume of his Gifford Lectures (1949–50), published as *The Mystery of Being, Volume I: Reflection and Mystery*, translated by G. S. Fraser (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), 197–219. In this final chapter he also refers to the articles on family in *Homo Viator* (200). Unlike these articles, however, his focus here is more on the kind of philosophy needed to address existence as mystery rather than family.

> In this sphere everything seems to go on as if I found myself acting on an intuition which I possess without immediately knowing myself to possess it – an intuition which cannot be, strictly speaking, self-conscious and which can grasp itself only through the modes of experience in which its image is reflected, and which it lights up by being thus reflected in them. (212)

This quote illustrates well the difficulty of expressing this character of mystery in general terms, which is precisely such that it cannot be defined in words. Mystery belongs, rather, to the category of experiences.

In these experiences the image of intuitive awareness is 'reflected'. At the same time this means 'lighting up' these experiences. In the earlier family lecture Marcel summarises the distinction as that between a problem that should be 'resolved' and a mystery that must be 'evoked' (*Homo Viator*, 66). The latter means that the 'soul should be awakened to its presence'. He also uses the term 'evoke' in a later text where he refers to music, one of Marcel's areas of expertise, besides philosophy and playwriting.[49]

He argues that the experience of mystery is one of presence, of 'being with' or communion, which does not completely 'crystallise in an idea'. It is like the moment in which, after hearing only three bars of a melody, one recognises that 'that is Fauré'. This 'presence' of Fauré's genius is distinct and insofar an idea, but not in the sense that it can be expressed to strangers in words.

> No, it is inconceivable that by words I could give an idea of something of a musical order in its qualitative singularity. I could try to do this only by playing it or by representing a significant melody – in other words, by participating actively in this music – in the hope that it will evoke (or, perhaps more exactly, that it will release) in the listeners a kind of inner movement by which they will move toward an encounter with what I am trying to have them hear.[50]

Rather than being discussed in general terms, a mystery is thus something to be evoked. In the Gifford Lectures, Marcel describes philosophy in the mode of this evocation as 'of a kind of appeal to the listener or the reader, of a kind of call upon his inner resources'. As such, it differs from reflection directed at 'merely . . . grasp[ing] the content' which can be valid for 'anybody at all' (*The Mystery of Being*, 213). Marcel also uses the terms

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[49] The text is a reply to an article by Gene Reeves on Marcel's idea of mystery in the seventeenth volume of the *Library of Living Philosophers* dedicated to Marcel, which was so delayed it was published only eleven years after his death (Gabriel Marcel, 'Reply to Gene Reeves', in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. 17, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn (Carbondale, IL: Open Court, 1984), 272–4).
[50] Marcel, 'Reply to Gene Reeves', 273.

'secondary' and 'primary reflection' for a mystery and a problem approach, respectively.[51]

While primary reflection creates a distance between the knowing subject and the object that should be understood as distinct from other objects, secondary reflection aims to restore 'a semblance of unity to the elements which primary reflection has first severed' (93).[52] This does not mean a 'refusal' of this primary reflection. Rather, secondary reflection springs from the realisation that the primary understanding of things as well-defined objects cannot be 'final'. The activity of 'the mind working on a problem' is limited ('Reply to Gene Reeves', 272). If one realises this limitation, one is calling forth something beyond it. Secondary reflection is directed at this beyond. As such, it is largely, or at least first of all, a negative or critical affair, that of 'understanding how *not to think of* it'. As Marcel argues in the early articles on family, the sphere indicated by mystery is 'not easily accessible to us by analysis' (*Homo Viator*, 81). Such an approach may rather 'prevent us from understanding' and therefore 'our thought has to work negatively'.

A positive moment follows from this. That the two belong together is explained by Brendan Sweetman, who understands Marcel's secondary reflection as 'post-reflective'.[53] It begins as 'the act of critical reflection on ordinary conceptual reflection' – that is, on primary reflection. It discovers the inadequacy of its expression of the 'nature of the self, or the self's most profound experiences'. Second, it discovers 'the realm of mystery' and 'motivates actions appropriate to this realm'. That mystery is related not just to experience but that this also leads to new acting is pointed out by other interpreters as well. Secondary reflection is called contemplation 'to participate with others to address and meet needs',[54] a passive 'opening itself

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[51] Marcel mentions these terms only briefly in the second of his articles on family from the early 1940s (*Homo Viator*, 93), but how he introduces the reflective approach to family as a mystery there (62–3) is in line with what he elsewhere calls 'secondary reflection'. Chapter V of the Gifford Lectures focusses on the distinction between primary and secondary reflection (*The Mystery of Being*, 77–102) and chapter X also characterises the approach to family as mystery as secondary reflection (215–19).

[52] Thomas Michaud emphasises that the expression of this 'holistic philosophical insight into a mystery' is first 'encountered intuitively in concrete, existential experience'. Secondary reflection thus aims to 'illumine and articulate' this intuition in a 'philosophically intelligible and satisfying account of the nature of mystery' (Thomas A. Michaud, 'Secondary Reflection and Marcelian Anthropology', *Philosophy Today* 34/3 (1990): 229–40, at 223).

[53] Brendan Sweetman, *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel: Epistemology, Human Person, the Transcendent* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 59. Sweetman opposes this understanding of secondary reflection as 'post-reflective' to David Appelbaum's, who regards it as pre-reflective involving 'sensation and embodiment' (58).

[54] Jill Hernandez presents this understanding of secondary reflection in relation to its being directed at what is beyond representation and going beyond subjectivity and objectivity towards participation

to the calling of Being' or 'the Other' which is 'more ethical than cognitive'.[55] These interpretations also recall the quotation in which Marcel relates the recognition of mystery to finding oneself 'acting on an intuition'.

As regards the topic of family, Marcel explains that the evocation of mystery is needed because there is no direct access to this topic by reflection. Family is both 'too close up' and 'too far away', or, better, these 'contraries are found to coincide here'. Family in the 'close up' sense concerns 'a certain pattern or constellation of which, as a child, I spontaneously take it for granted that I am the centre' (*Homo Viator*, 64). As I grow older, I no longer take this spontaneous self-evident centre position but discover the others as others and the relationship between us. I become part of the intricate dialectics of their presence and absence. I discover myself as a separate self and as part of something greater than myself.

Here we touch on the 'far away' part of family. I come to understand myself in relation to those who have given me birth and through them in relation to my progenitors, and to future descendants as well. The relationship to family members from the past and future is 'far more obscure and intimate' than that of cause and effect, which is the model of understanding in primary reflection. 'I share with them as they share with me, invisibly –; they are consubstantial with me, and I with them' (*Homo Viator*, 65).

Marcel draws a parallel between this mystery of family and that of 'incarnation', which he specifies first as unity of soul and body and, second, as my relationships to those who have given me birth. I 'incarnate' the 'reply' to that power which brought two people together so new life came into being. Becoming aware of this means becoming aware that I am not 'endowed with an absolute existence of my own'.

In this first sketch of Marcel's distinction between problem and mystery, there are already elements that resonate with how we so far have positioned the approach of our study in relation to existing family research. We emphasised from the outset the double difficulty of understanding what family is about. The first difficulty concerns the current controversial character of family. Family is discussed as something that people are in favour of or against. The question of what family might mean is not posed here; it is supposed to be evident. We observed that even research at the academic level,

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in the other ('On the Problem and Mystery of Evil: Marcel's Existential Dissolution of an Antinomy', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 23/2 (2018): 113–24, at 119–20).

[55] This characterisation is taken from Martín Grassi, 'Existence as Belonging: The Existentialism of Gabriel Marcel', *Trilhas Filosóficas* 12/3 (Edição Especial) (2019): 29–35, https://doi.org/10.25244/tf.v13i3.1222.

which as such is not the result of an ideological debate, pays little attention to this question.

In the sociological accounts we analysed, family stands for given and enduring relations of dependence and is concluded to belong to the past. Interest in family is labelled nostalgic. In the historical and empirical approaches this contrast model is criticised, but this does not result in more attention paid to the question why these models prevail and nourish the controversies about family. In a different sense, the controversy remains unremarked in ethical approaches because the problematic character of family is regarded there as a classic issue and not so much a contemporary one.

Of course, these approaches do give insight into aspects of family life and its controversial status. However, our concern is that the controversy is interpreted too quickly, as if it were obvious what it is about. The question of what family stands for is not recognised as an open issue that needs to be explored first. It is a similar kind of concern that we perceive in Marcel's distinction between problem and mystery approaches. A problem approach, which places topics at a distance in order to analyse their factual character and to arrive at objectively convincing insights also in their value, is visible in much of the aforementioned research into family. It is often focussed on specific aspects of family life, like parenthood or partner relations, and family is not approached in general, as a phenomenon as such. This corresponds to Marcel's observation that, as soon as one approaches family as a problem, one ends up in an 'infinity of problems of every description which could not be considered as a whole' (*Homo Viator*, 62). This implies a lack of attention to something like a distinct logic of the family in general, which cannot be reduced to one of its specific aspects or functions.

Mystery and the Controversial Status of Family

The second difficulty of ethical reflection on family we indicated from the outset is the fundamental one of how to speak about what family might mean. We referred to the story of *Housekeeping* because its literary mode of expression makes the reader wonder what family means. The same cannot be achieved by, for example, enumerating some of the main characteristics of family. *Housekeeping* gives rise to the question of what family is about more than that it answers it. Robinson herself speaks of family relations as 'essentially mysterious manifestations' and of an 'unspoken quality'.[56]

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[56] Pinsker, 'Marilynne Robinson', 121, 123.

Can Marcel's approach also be a way to reflect on this second difficulty of the mysterious, unspoken character of family? To decide on this, we need to go into how Marcel elaborates on family as a mystery. As we saw, Marcel first highlights the point that a mystery is a topic in which a researcher is in some way involved. Thus, it is myself, as an existing person, that I approach in dealing with family. This is an 'impenetrable world' in a twofold sense (*Homo Viator*, 66). It concerns the difficulty as such of reflecting on family as revealing one's own existence as related to a past and a future in the obscure sense of 'sharing', of being 'consubstantial' (65). This impenetrability is also a contemporary one, however; it is a result of a blindness to family as mystery that Marcel observes in his time.

Evoking family as mystery is therefore 'extraordinarily difficult'. It presupposes the realisation that 'previously one had entirely lost sight of it' (66). This second difficulty shows that Marcel's mystery approach to family is connected with an analysis of his time and of the controversial nature of the subject of family in his time. This clearly resonates with the aim of our project to relate the two difficulties of the charged character and the general difficulty of formulating what family is about. How does Marcel elaborate this interwovenness?

Marcel finds evidence of a blindness to mystery in 'the controversies of a strictly spectacular order which arose in the period between the wars, whether in the Press or in public meetings, in connection with marriage, divorce, the choice of a lover, the practices of birth-control, etc.' (66). These controversies concern the general issue of whether family is 'an institution which has lost its meaning' or 'still a living reality' (67). The 'incontestable statistics' show 'the huge increase of divorce, the general spreading of abortive practices, etc.' which are proof of a crisis.

Here Marcel seems to be articulating the well-known worried views about family. He continues by explaining that these are 'facts which force us to penetrate deeper in order to expose the roots of these "social facts"'. These roots lie at the 'level of belief, or more exactly, *unbelief*' (67). By this he means that the changes that have occurred in family life should be understood as changes in the 'attitude towards life' (69). This attitude used to be determined by 'a sense of holiness', a 'reverence for existence' and 'a certain state of poetry which the created world produces in us' (69).[57]

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[57] Marcel (*Homo Viator*, 69) refers to Albert Béguin, who quotes Ramuz, but without providing bibliographical details.

This attitude, however, has given way to 'the pressure of pride, of pretentiousness, of boredom and despair' (70). The consequences of this change in attitude 'first become apparent' in the 'domain of the family reality'. This means that the starting point of reflection on family must not be a mere 'moral crisis' in the sense of deliberately rejecting certain traditional principles (69). Reflection should penetrate to the level of the attitude underlying these principles.

Marcel clearly tries to find a way of discussing family without immediately becoming part of contemporary public controversies. On the other hand, he definitely works with a contrast model in analysing his time as one in which a feeling for the sacred is disappearing. This is not simply a straightforward expression of a conservative or nostalgic, religious world view. His project is more subtle and cautious, an attempt to elaborate a different, new kind of approaching the world than he thinks dominant in his time, also in research.

This is the first, negative part of a mystery approach. Marcel characterises the dominant approaches from which he distinguishes his mystery approach as a rational or formal one on the one hand and a naturalist or animalist one on the other (79–81). Rational, formal views are visible in that marriage and procreation are understood in terms of a contract. Marriage as a contract implies that the spouses can revoke it and also that convention reigns and the individual is sacrificed to the interests of society (80). There are no other categories to understand marriage than as the common accord of two individuals or of society.

This perspective may easily 'slide to the grossest form of naturalism' – the second dominant perspective – which sees marriage and family life as parallel to mating and procreation in the animal world. Marriage is then seen as 'a mere association of individual interests' or as a means to arrange reproduction (81). In both the latter biological and the former juridical views, laws of cause and effect or efficiency are the primary principles for understanding family. This causality thinking is also how Marcel characterises primary reflection. This approach is not questioned: it is obvious that family is based on the consent of two partners or understood as indispensable to the survival of the human race. Here again, it is easy to draw parallels with our comments about the obviousness of the meaning of family in recent family research.

It is in distinction to these views that Marcel then arrives at a second, more precise and positive characterisation of a mystery approach. It focusses on family as a unity and not on one of its 'innumerable aspects' (92) which may be analysed in isolation. Over against historical understandings that confront us with the relative character of family life in each

time and place, a mystery approach seeks for a 'constant element' (93). By this, Marcel means a 'demand rather than a law'. This constant element is something that, in his view, can be discerned precisely when it is under pressure, in a 'time of crisis and transition'.

This recalls our initial observations regarding *Housekeeping* where family ties also come to light precisely because they are challenged and even broken. What is the constant element that lights up, according to Marcel? He first points out that an 'exercise of a fundamental generosity' (81) lies at the basis of family which is related to the character of life as creation. Marcel descries an ambiguity, a moment of receiving and of giving in both this generosity and creation. Starting a family is then understood as an 'act of thanksgiving, a creative testimony' (82). Like an artist, the human being is in the family setting 'the bearer of some flame which he must kindle and pass on' (82).

In all these expressions, it is clear that there is more to family life than biology can explain or convention can organise. Understanding family in this way makes it possible, in Marcel's view, 'to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life' (82). It is this level of the bond with life that doesn't come into view in the naturalist and formal approaches. Because humans are beings with 'spirit' and not 'mere living beings' (78), they have a feeling for this sacred bond. Family is a context in which human beings are addressed as spirit because family incarnates the bond or pact of human beings with life (78). This pact implies two 'realities' – that of human beings and that of life – and a reciprocal movement between them. Human beings have confidence in life, and life responds to this confidence. It is this 'harmony between consciousness and the life force' (81) that family may incarnate. This is the level or sphere of family as mystery which is, as indicated earlier, not 'easily accessible to us by analysis'.

The Critical and Constructive Character of a Mystery Approach

What we recognise in Marcel's reflection on family is first of all an interest at the fundamental level of the family in general, and in what family as a phenomenon is about, as distinct from studies that focus on a variety of specific family-related topics. Moreover, in Marcel's approach to family as mystery the difficulty of answering this fundamental question is paramount. He also distinguishes his interest from the polarised way family is approached in public debate and from historical or naturalist understandings in which it is suggested to be obvious what family means and based on facts.

However, as we saw, when he sketches this public debate, his tone seems to be the well-known worried one, and he refers to the standard controversial issues of divorce, abortion and so forth. Is Marcel not too much part of the controversy to be able to open up an alternative view?

This question also rises in relation to the context of Vichy France in which Marcel's lectures on family were originally given. The topic of family attracted a lot of attention at that time. In particular, from 1940 onwards, the Vichy Regime had developed an explicit family politics in its 'National Revolution'. The regime took strong measures to prevent women from having a paid job and to keep them at home, preferably as mothers of a large family. The importance of family was seen as basic: it was regarded as the 'initial cell' of society and as the alternative for individualism.[58] This politics was, moreover, presented as a return to nature.

Marcel's lectures do not simply go with the tide of idolisation of family, however. They can very well be read as a criticism of the family politics of the Vichy Regime, albeit in veiled terms. He explicitly opposes the views that, 'even during this lamentable period' of the war, 'families have kept their vitality and preserved their unity' (*Homo Viator*, 67) and that 'during the last two years' – that is, under the Vichy Regime – 'a vigorous and healthy reaction has taken place' against forces that harm family (68). On this point, Marcel states that 'the multiplication of catchwords and well-known slogans in official speeches and in the Press should not mislead us' (69).

Apart from these statements, his entire argument is that it is not the family as such that should be resuscitated but the pact with life that family incarnates. This seems to go against the family ideology of his day. The second lecture focusses on the wish to have children, which was clearly a topical issue given the fertility cult that stimulated big families. Here, Marcel is again critical: he opposes the idea that fatherhood is given with procreation as such, and proposes an understanding focussed on 'creation'.

Moreover, both lectures argue against a biological understanding of family or a detached historical one, which he characterises as 'starting from below, that is to say from a biology of racialism or eugenics infected with ill-will' (90). The reverence towards life he aims for cannot be regained by starting from below. Thus, it seems that Marcel's mystery

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[58] Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender*, translated by Kathleen A. Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2001), 173–7. Muel-Dreyfus does not mention Gabriel Marcel.

approach is not just critical of family-dissolving tendencies but also of pro-family views like that of the Vichy Regime. His fundamental approach unmasks both sides as not taking family in its deeper, true sense into account – that is, as embodying or incarnating the bond with life itself.

The alternative approach by means of which Marcel criticises and aims to get beyond reigning family controversies thus focusses on this bond with life. It implies an analysis of his time as lacking 'a sense of holiness', a 'reverence for existence' (69). This focus and analysis are introduced rather straightfor-wardly, however, which gives rise to the question of whether this reflection really can live up to the expectations aroused by the term 'mystery'. Does it really account for the difficulty of naming what family might mean?

Marcel's understanding of family in terms of its connection to life is not a conclusion, the end of his arguments. In his Gifford Lectures he describes approaching the family bond as mystery as 'metasociological' – that is, as 'going deeper than sociology does'. It scrutinises family at the level of the questions of 'What am I?' and 'How is it that I am able to ask myself what I am?' (*The Mystery of Being*, 197).[59] The first thing Marcel points to in relation to these fundamental questions is the need to acknowledge life as a gift, which is precisely what he sees lacking in his time (198). Again, this is not a conclusive answer to the question 'What am I?' and a definitive analysis of his time. It is more like the first indication of the attitude needed to arrive at this level of questions and to see these as meaningful questions at all. Approaching family as mystery presupposes this attitude. In the earlier family lectures, he uses terms like 'gratitude' and 'respect' to charac-terise it (*Homo Viator*, 93).

We have already mentioned the notion of a 'confidence in life' (78, 112) which is reciprocal and can therefore 'almost equally be regarded as a call or as a response' (112). The attitude needed to reflect in the mode of mystery may be summed up in the term 'piety' (94). Marcel emphasises that piety should not be understood as 'devotion' or 'edification' but as 'piety in knowledge'. This knowledge has a 'sense' of the 'metaphysical principle' that should be acknowledged as the third 'impulse' that shapes life, apart from 'natural determinism' and 'human will' (93). This principle is not arrived at by intellectual knowledge but 'belongs to faith alone'. It is a matter of 'sensing its mysterious efficacy and bowing to it humbly' (93).

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[59] In the brief summary of the fifth chapter of *The Mystery and Being* (volume I), Marcel defines philosophy as 'called upon' to focus on the question 'what am I?' (x), which is also the recuperative question of secondary reflection by which it aims to recover the unity that has been dismantled in the analysis of primary reflection.

To point out this attitude needed for a mystery approach, philosophers have no other 'weapon' at their disposal than actual reflection itself. What might this reflection achieve when it starts from a humble bowing to a mysterious efficacy? Marcel himself calls this reflection both a 'heroic' and a 'seemingly desperate effort' (93). This is the secondary reflection that aims for 'remaking, thread by thread, the spiritual fabric heedlessly torn by a primary reflection . . . opposed to gratitude and respect for what is sacred'. A strong criticism of one-sided approaches in terms of problems thus goes hand in hand with an awareness of the slow labour of reweaving the mystery. Thus, Marcel's project of approaching family as mystery is not a matter of wallowing in the arcane.[60]

Marcel's aim is a constructive one.[61] Awareness of the character of mystery is a positive methodological starting point, not an end point of reflection nor meant to discourage it.[62] It indicates an attitude and a substantial focus. The focus is on family as a phenomenon in which the mysterious pact of human beings with life becomes pre-eminently visible. This has the twofold character of both receiving life as a gift and responding to it. In order to understand family in this way, an attitude of piety and reverence is needed.

It is striking that Marcel rather frankly uses language with religious overtones and emphasises that a mystery approach also implies a feeling for the sacred. As regards the theme of family, the conviction behind this approach is that 'so-called natural relationships . . . can never be reduced to simple experimental data' (89). Understanding them from an attitude of piety means acknowledging that these relationships receive their energy, impulse or flourishing, not just in a natural or historical chain of cause and

[60] Marcel realises that this concern may arise. When he introduces the notion of mystery in relation to family at the end of *The Mystery of Being* (volume I) as 'the notion in which the whole first volume logically culminates', he suggests that one may object that family is an 'institution', a 'fact' which 'can be studied . . . by the methods of positive science' (204). Is the language of mystery not 'a touch of vague literary floweriness at a level of discourse where such battered ornaments of speech have no proper place?' He starts the defence of his approach by pointing out the need to approach family in its current context 'from the inside' because it is 'our situation' and continues by explaining the idea of 'presence' which, as we have seen, is crucial for understanding in the mode of mystery.

[61] Thomas Busch uses the term 'constructive' in a reply to Paul Ricoeur's objection that Marcel's secondary reflection largely takes the form of a critique. Busch observes 'positive' and 'constructive' ways of secondary reflection – in particular, Marcel's 'use of drama to fictionally portray life'. He refers to chapter VIII of the Gifford Lectures, which deals with self-reflection. Here Marcel explicitly emphasises the importance of narrative for the 'recollective' act of reflection (Thomas W. Busch, 'Secondary Reflection as Interpretation', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 7/1–2 (1995): 176–83, at 180).

[62] Marcel points several times to what he calls the 'technical' character of the category 'mystery' (e.g., *The Mystery of Being*, 204).

effect but from the relationship with a deeper or encompassing dimension, life itself, as Marcel calls it.

Deprived of this pact with life, family relationships are not 'consistent' or 'solid'. Natural feelings of 'tenderness', 'compassion' or 'affection' cannot be the basis of family responsibility (101). They may very well be 'superficial and passing'. What is needed for a family to flourish is a 'consecration' (90, 110–11) of human beings to this bond with life. Marcel emphasises that this mystery approach is not limited to a specific religious belief – in particular, a Christian one in his context (86). His analysis of his time as one of a blindness to mystery is therefore not to be seen as some kind of secularisation thesis. Rather, he indicates that his time is not entirely lacking in a '*religio* . . . which apart from any essentially Christian spirituality gives evidence of the pact between man and the life-force', a 'natural morality and order' (86). On the other hand, he also uses conceptions and images taken from Christian language to express this pact. For Marcel, these forms of expression do not exclude each other.

A Mystery Approach as a Theological Contribution to Family Research

We called the frank way in which Marcel takes the dimension of the sacred into account striking. It may be expected that a philosopher points out the limited character of understanding family in terms of statistics, facts, history or nature. But that a philosopher characterises a 'metasociological' approach directed at 'the roots of the "social facts"' as one of 'piety in knowledge' that has a sense of the 'metaphysical principle' does not seem self-evident. One may refer to Marcel's conversion to Roman Catholicism to explain his orientation, but that does not explain the specific ways in which he relates family to the sacred, transcendence and God.[63] Moreover, he uses the term

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[63] It is remarkable that the extensive volume on Marcel in the Library of Living Philosophers series does not contain an article on the role of Marcel's conversion and adherence to the Roman Catholic Church after 1929. In his article on 'availability' Otto Friedrich Bollnow briefly touches upon it when he discusses whether Christian faith is 'an indispensable presupposition of his philosophy' (Otto Friedrich Bollnow, 'Marcel's Concept of Availability', in Schilpp and Hahn, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 180). He argues that Marcel's thinking should not be regarded as 'denominational', as is common in Germany: 'it contains truths that are accessible from a purely philosophical orientation and that are not contingent upon specific theological presuppositions'. In his reply to Bollnow, Marcel agrees to his rejection of the characterisation 'denominational'. His conversion led him to pay 'more explicit' attention to hope. Marcel immediately adds, however, that it is extremely important to realise that, for him, 'Christianity gives a specific character to a relatively special context of data that can also be accessible to non-Christians' ('Reply to Otto Friedrich Bollnow', idem: 200). In a study of Marcel's plays, Michaud argues that Marcel is a 'Catholic playwright' but in a specific sense (Thomas A. Michaud, 'Gabriel Marcel's Catholic Dramaturgy', *Renascence* 55/3 (2003): 229–44, at 229). Catholicism is not something accidental or something to be liberated from,

'mystery' not just in relation to family but precisely to indicate all kinds of moments or phenomena in which the sacred may light up. As we have noticed, his attentiveness to the dimension of the sacred is not put in exclusively Christian or religious terms but mostly in more general notions like 'life' or 'being' and attitudes of 'respect' and 'reverence'. It is this seemingly self-evident combination of religious and general, philosophical language that is striking, in that it is not easy to find in our time.

Of course, Christian religious arguments aiming to protect the good of family against threats abound, now as well, but these usually start from the presupposition of the good of family as a somehow divinely ordained institution which should be defended against the current powers that aim to dismantle it. Here again, it is obvious what family means and that it is in crisis and should be protected or revitalised. As indicated earlier, Marcel's approach is not free from such a contrasting scheme. His worries about family and the lack of a feeling for its mystery character, however, do not mean that it is obvious what family is about and that the problems can be identified and solved by some traditional kind of family life. By approaching family as mystery, he aims to get beyond the controversies in which family is seen as either an institution to be restored or an obstacle to get rid of. He draws attention to the difficulty of accounting for what is at stake in the topic of family on a deeper level than that of concrete problems.

Marcel does not arrive at some concrete analysis of the good functions of family life or a definition of its ideal forms. He tries to relate the topic of family, with all its controversial connotations, to deeper, existential questions of creativity, givenness, thankfulness, hope and so forth. In the present day, such a philosophical approach to family that self-evidently uses religious thinking to illuminate the existential 'roots of the "social facts"' is far from obvious; religious language seems to be largely perceived as reserved for the believing community. This study will proceed in the mode of Marcel's mystery approach. We will explain what that means by indicating its relation to other recent family studies that reckon with a transcendent dimension.

Understanding Family with an Eye to Transcendence

Proceeding in the mode of Marcel's mystery approach does not mean we recognise and endorse every part of Marcel's reflection on family. In particular, we do not follow him in his worries about family life in his days. However, we

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but neither is Marcel a Catholic 'apologist or ideologue' (230). His plays are not 'thesis pieces' but inquiries into the 'fundamental antinomies' of human existence.

do want to take up the challenge of further exploring the value of the notion of mystery for moral reflection on family. We will take this up as an exploration of what it may yield to understand the phenomenon of family, the experiences of family life, as calling forth the realm of the transcendent in human life – and, conversely, whether taking a transcendent dimension into account gives a better understanding of family.

While Marcel does so in a rather frank and straightforward interpretation of the controversy on family as resulting from a blindness to mystery or a lack of piety and respect for life itself, our approach may again be characterised as more basic, open and neutral. For us, it is rather an open question what lights up when a transcendental dimension is brought into the exploration of what family might mean in the current atmosphere of controversy. This question stems from our theological background and affinity with Christian perspectives on life. Like Marcel, we seek a language and a mode of reflection that does not limit theology to those already involved in institutionalised religion. In such a project, the choice of topics is crucial. Theology, especially theological ethics, may play a part in broader academic reflection by choosing topics that touch upon religion but are also found outside it and are somehow controversial.[64] In our view, family is such a theme. Marcel's notion of 'mystery' as indicating a level of ethical reflection that accounts for a transcendent dimension is one that we will further explore as to its power to illuminate.

This transcendent dimension was already implicit in the focus to this study that we introduced earlier. The choice to focus on the aspects of givenness and dependence can now be better understood against the background of our interest in religion. We presented these notions as referring to experiences that cannot easily be understood in a meaningful way within the current dominant ways of thinking. Now, moreover, we can point out that these concepts can very well be associated with a religious view of the world and of human beings. Givenness is at stake in the belief that life is not a random coincidence but a gift, created with a meaning or a calling.

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[64] For similar reasons, my book *Reconsidering Evil* deals with the topic of evil (Petruschka Schaafsma, *Reconsidering Evil: Confronting Reflections with Confessions*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, Vol. 36 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), see especially chapter 1). It approaches evil as a theme that is largely objected to because of its broadness and vagueness and is often dismantled into concrete problems, while at the same time the language of evil prevails. Moreover, this language seems to have a religious connotation – a hypothesis that is then taken as the main question to be examined in this book.

Such a view implies a fundamental dependence of human beings on the giver, the Creator or the one who calls. Dependence is also at stake in the idea that human beings are called to the good: they do not know the good by themselves nor are they able to accomplish it. Religious notions like deliverance, grace and forgiveness express a fundamental kind of dependence insofar as these are understood to be something that human beings cannot accomplish or control by themselves.

By drawing attention to givenness and dependence as aspects of life people of our time are not well-equipped to deal with, we do not intend to come up with another major contrast between our time as secular and some bygone religious age. Our observation is more neutral: these are themes that theology has had a centuries-long affinity for. They are not the exclusive property of theology, however. They are open enough to include meanings and discussions that are not put in explicitly religious language. For example, an important ethical issue related to givenness is the question of the moral weight of what is called 'the natural given' or, often in contrast to it, 'the cultural given'. In a similar way, there is a broad ethical debate on the moral implications of our human dependency, in particular in relation to care. By focussing on precisely these issues which have a religious connotation but are also discussed more broadly, we aim to explore what theology may contribute to broader debates.

The urgency behind Marcel's reflection on family turned out to be a waning feeling for the sacred, or life itself, as he also calls it. For him, the controversial character of family is related to what can be called the controversial character of the sacred.[65] For Marcel, this starting point is

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[65] In a different way, the French philosopher Jean-Philippe Pierron characterises the present controversies on family in terms of the sacred ('Famille et Sécularisation. Penser la Famille en Postchrétienté', *Théophilyon* 21/1 (2016): 145–65; see also Pierron's earlier book *Le Climat Familial. Une Poétique de la Famille* (Paris: Éditions Cerf, 2009), especially chapters 2 and 5). In close association with Charles Taylor's analysis of secularisation as a process of finding new balances between religions and political institutions, he asks how the symbolisation of family could take shape in our pluralist time in which Christian symbolic language is no longer self-evident or understandable. Departing from Paul Ricoeur's understanding of the symbol as opening up to a surplus of meaning by suspending a direct referential meaning (159), he emphasises the need for symbolisation to express the characteristic ambiguity of family as nature and culture, gift and construct, and that of the 'opaque depth of attachment' (155). A functional understanding of family cannot account for these aspects; neither can the currently dominant reductive views of family that present unattainable ideals, a so-called natural phenomenon, or approach it only as a chain of consumers. Over against these 'closed', univocal symbolisations, Pierron argues for forms that are 'robust' but open to a plurality of interpretations (158–9). Spiritual or religious explorations of family and those in the arts are sources that may nourish such symbolisation because they guard an open, creative expression, though they cannot guarantee this (164). See also my article 'The Family As Mystery: Why Taking into Account Transcendence Is Needed in Current Family Debates', in *The Transcendent Character of the Good: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. by Petruschka Schaafsma (London: Routledge 2022), 210–27.

a statement; for our study, it is a question. While Marcel states the import-
ance of the approach to reality in terms of mystery, our study asks what the
illuminative power of the notion of mystery in understanding what family is
about could be. We do not argue that there is no awareness of family as
mystery. What our explorations of family research have revealed so far is
a lack of interest in the phenomenon of the family in general. Our intuition
that reflection on this general level is crucial to understanding and overcom-
ing current controversies and polarisation regarding family does not seem to
be widespread. There is also little attention paid to the unnameable character
of what family could mean. We will explore whether the notion of mystery
can be a way to constructively incorporate this unnameability into an ethical
reflection that reaches beyond the controversies.

Creating a Dialogue between Religious and Secular Perspectives

In this formulation of the aims of our study, we view ethical reflection in
a broad sense – that is, not limited to authors who reflect from an explicit
religious perspective nor to theologians but as actively seeking a dialogue with
what the New Studies in Christian Ethics series calls the 'secular moral debate'.
By creating dialogue between explicitly religious thinking and reflection that
does not regard itself as religious, the series' aims of investigating the value of
reflection which is 'not entirely secular' as well as the possible 'distinctively
theological justification for moral choices and acts' can be met.[66] In our study

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[66] In the first chapter of his *Moral Passion and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2017), the series editor Robin Gill analyses the foregoing thirty-four volumes of the series with
respect to the role moral passion plays in it. He points out that the first monograph of the series by
Kieran Cronin (1992) elaborates the aims of the series in three phases which 'successfully shaped
subsequent books in the series'. They consist of learning from a secular discipline, challenging
a purely secular understanding, deepening and enriching it with an understanding that is not
entirely secular and, finally, identifying a distinctively theological justification for moral choices and
acts, or the framework for it (19–20). An interesting parallel to this ethical approach from the
German theological context is the recent family study by Saskia Lieske (*Von der Form zur
Beziehungsgestaltung: Zugänge zur Familie in der evangelischen Ethik*, Arbeiten zur systematischen
Theologie, Vol. 12 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019)). It opens with an analysis of how
marriage and family are understood in German law (chapter 2) and how they are approached in
different branches of contemporary sociology (chapter 3). These non-theological disciplines are
analysed first in order to gain insight into how families actually live, to 'contextualise' the ethical
debates and to avoid an 'all too biased' presentation of current family life from an ethical perspective
(19–20). Subsequently, two theological perspectives by Trutz Rendtorff and Wilfried Härle are
analysed and compared. The book concludes with an elaboration of ethical criteria that can be the
basis of a good family life. Thus, Lieske aims for a reflection on family that goes beyond the
dominant ones that focus on its form and function (305–6).
    Another type of theological engagement with other secular approaches to family is found in
a seminal article on the European debate on family. It grew out of an ecumenical theological-
ethical research group's consideration of the meaning of family and was discussed in a conference

the most important secular perspectives will come from philosophy, social anthropology and care ethics and, in this chapter, also from different branches of sociology.

The aim of 'engaging centrally with the secular moral debate' and exploring what the 'distinctive contribution' of theology may be in this broad ethical debate has not yet been elaborated in the series with a separate focus on family. Monographs with a related topic, most extensively those by Lisa Sowle Cahill on 'sex and gender' (1996), Adrian Thatcher on 'living together' (2002) and Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar on 'human dependency' (2017), do pay quite a bit of attention to family.[67] The latter volume focusses on dependency as a central aspect of human existence and will be part of our reflection on this theme in Chapter 4. Cahill's *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* appeared as part of the 'Religion, Culture, and Family Project', directed by Don Browning, to which we will turn in Chapter 3. The project aims to offer a 'critical familism': an alternative, liberal and critical, but not leftist, position in the American family debate that had been dominated by rightist pro-family voices.[68] At the heart of this project

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with contributions from sociology, psychology and family law (Gerhard Höver et al., eds., *Die Familie im neuen Europa. Ethische Herausforderungen und interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, Symposion: Anstöße zur interdisziplinären Verständigung, Vol. 9 (Muenster: LIT, 2008)). In the opening article, 'The Freedom of the Family: An Ecumenical Contribution to a European Debate' (9–60), the four editors find the specific character of the theological approach in focussing on the 'freedom of the family', by which they mean an attentiveness to the distinct calling or 'inherent logic' (56) of family that also has a 'moral and theological significance' (13). They call their analysis an 'ascriptive' one, distinct from an empirical, 'descriptive' one or the ideal, 'prescriptive' one. The starting point of the ascriptive account of family is 'simply that every human being is *born into* a network of relations' which implies claims and responsibilities (14). They subsequently relate this perspective to views of and approaches to family in current European family policy, especially as reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and arrive at a critique of the latter's focus on the social function of family.

[67] There are several brief reflections on family in other volumes in relation, for example, to the 'given' character of human nature (Gerald P. McKenny, *Biotechnology, Human Nature, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 2), to the moral passion for the good in different religious traditions (Robin Gill, *Moral Passion*, 167–75), and to evolutionary theory and Christian natural law thinking (Stephen Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapter 12).

[68] The theological ethicist Brent Waters lists Browning's 'critical familism' as a form of 'critical adaptation'. This is one of the three approaches Waters distinguishes in contemporary Christian thinking on family, the others being 'reformulation' and 'resistance' (Brent Waters, *The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter 3). He understands these approaches as engagements with the 'volatile social and political context' of late liberalism. In this context family is regarded as in 'dire need of radical reform and political regulation' (96–7). From its early seventeenth-century representatives, liberalism has focussed on freedom and autonomy in the sense of shaping one's own life. As a result, family has finally lost its legitimate, independent position between the individual and the state and is only understood in terms of serving the former or the latter (chapter 2). Thus, in the current late liberal context, family has become 'the object of heated moral debate'.

as well as of Cahill's monograph is thus the intention to overcome the controversial status of family as a result of polarised debates, especially in a Christian setting. Adrian Thatcher is also seen as identifying with the aims of Browning's larger family research project.[69] Cahill and Thatcher clearly elaborate their mediating positions in different ways, however.

Cahill starts from the epistemological issue of moral relativism as a result of postmodern critiques of absolutist views. The fundamental issue of moral objectivity remains a central one in her book. As regards sex, the absolute norms of traditional Christianity were largely restrictive, denying the importance of bodily pleasure and, as to gender, they included fixed roles in a patriarchal hierarchy. As a feminist thinker, Cahill is partly sympathetic to the critiques of these norms insofar as they reveal and denounce oppressive structures and find the highest or most basic moral norm in the equality of all human beings. In her view, the result is that ethics within and outside Christianity has paid less attention to the social context of sexuality, including family. The Christian tradition itself can be a very rich source for nourishing a view of sex and gender that takes its social value to heart and in general for developing a 'social ethics, including and protecting society's judged, outcast, and vulnerable'.[70]

Cahill starts her unlocking of the richness of the Christian tradition in the New Testament. It offers insights into how early Christianity embodied specific values and became a 'dangerously countercultural' factor precisely as regards matters of marriage, parenthood, family, gender and sexuality.[71] For example, it became possible for women not to marry and have children. More equality within marriage was propagated, although within the confines of the time. The reigning views of family were challenged by the option of celibacy for women and men and by the central importance of the new family of brothers and sisters found in the Christian community.

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[69] Robin Gill, 'General Editor's Preface', in *Living Together and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ix. Brent Waters does not list Thatcher's views in the same category as Browning's project but characterises Thatcher's views as 'reformulation' (*The Family*, 103–5). The main reason for this seems to be Thatcher's 'radical reform' (105) in his proposal to extend the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples in *Marriage after Modernity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[70] Cahill, *Sex, Gender*, 166.

[71] Cahill, *Sex, Gender*, 151. See also Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2000), especially chapter 2. She deals with the different views of family in the New Testament: Jesus' 'anti-family' sayings, Paul's view of the new family in Christ and the especially deutero-Pauline tendencies to restrict the freedom of slaves and women in an 'accomodationist attempt' (39) to envisage a Christian life within the limits of the status quo. She finally concludes that early Christianity was ambivalent as regards family (39), but that 'Jesus' kingdom teaching of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion' (41) did influence concrete family life.

Because of these challenges, it was less obvious to early Christians that transformation towards 'greater equality, compassion and solidarity' (*Sex, Gender*, 117) could also take place through family itself. For current social Christian ethics, it is crucial, according to Cahill, to regard family as 'an axis of social transformation' (165). This does not mean that Christians should primarily oppose abortion or divorce, as is often the case, but that they should contribute to the transformation of the family life that leads to such problematic situations. That means working to 'overcome every inequity of race, class, or gender' instead of condemning 'the sexual sinfulness of those who are already on society's bottom rung' or 'devalued even by their own family members and religious communities' (215).

To elaborate the outlines of such an ethics, Cahill analyses the Christian tradition throughout the centuries on marriage, divorce, sex and birth control (chapter 6) as well as more recent debates on these topics in which she includes secular contributions. As regards the latter, she analyses new reproductive technology with respect to its underlying views of sexuality and gender. Clearly, the interest in family in this book is one of overcoming current injustices with special attention paid to the social character of human existence. The contribution of Christian ethics to this transformation is a critical rediscovery of its own tradition as both a hindrance to and as giving strong arguments for equality, solidarity and compassion.

A similar positive retrieval of elements from the Christian tradition while also pointing out its harmful effects can be seen in Adrian Thatcher's monograph on 'living together'. While Cahill presents her focus first through a partial confirmation of the postmodern critique of traditional views of sex and gender, Thatcher defines the moral issue of his book first in terms of factual family changes. An 'unprecedented shift in family formation' has taken place since the 1970s: the increase in cohabitation before, after and instead of marriage.[72]

Here the main problem is not, as in Cahill, injustice in the sense of inequality and oppression; rather, Thatcher presents the central problems as less satisfaction in and duration of the relationships, higher chances of abuse and bad economic consequences in the form of poverty. These problems affect all family members, including the most vulnerable ones, the children. Thatcher admits that contemporary data on the spread and consequences of cohabitation may become 'redundant quickly' (4). Nevertheless, he takes them seriously as largely a 'depressing read' that

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[72] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 3.

show that cohabitation is 'a state of affairs to avoid' (36). To this negative analysis of the cohabitation data, Thatcher adds that the churches 'nearly unanimously' reject cohabitation (41). A theological perspective on relationships focusses on how people are healed of their brokenness by God in Christ. According to Thatcher, there are 'few indications' that cohabitation offers people the experience of such a healing (43). This does not mean that cohabitation should simply be opposed by Christians. Theology and the churches should take the reality of the increase in cohabitation seriously and offer an alternative which enables people to flourish in their partner relations. Thatcher finds this alternative in a retrieval of the neglected Christian tradition of betrothal. A practice of betrothal helps to develop the couple's early, somewhat cautious longing to live together into a durable one, ending in marriage. This is less likely to happen when cohabitation is seen as a 'try-out'.

Cahill and Thatcher show us different examples of what a theological contribution to a broader ethical debate may look like. They do not focus on family as such, but family is a crucial factor in their arguments concerning sex, gender and partner relations. For Cahill, family is part of the social character of sex and gender that is easily lost sight of in the postmodern reappropriation of the pleasure of sex and the struggle for gender equality. Thatcher points out the value of durable family forms. Durability is threatened by a constant reassessment of partner relationships in terms of individual satisfaction. To put it in the terms of our study, Cahill draws attention to the dependence implied in family life, and Thatcher to its given character.

The Specific Character of a Theological Mystery Approach

Can the theological arguments of Cahill and Thatcher also be understood as ways to approach family as mystery in the sense we introduced it? Both authors do pay attention to the existential level underlying concrete problems of gender inequality or bad relationships, but these concrete problems remain their starting point and focus. They do not start from an interest in the question of what family could mean. As a result, it is also more or less evident at the outset what the good of family is.

Family is about equal and enduring relationships that lead to human flourishing. It is the task of Christian ethics to provide insight into what partner relationships, gender and sex may look like in such a family setting. In doing so, these types of Christian ethics also address the controversial status of family. They oppose the suspicion of family by showing

how family can be compatible with contemporary ideals of individual self-development, freedom and equality, which of course implies a reconstruction of these ideals. A distinctively theological moment is the anchoring of this understanding of family in the countercultural teaching and practice of the early church as the body of Christ in which all are equal (Cahill, *Sex, Gender*, chapter 5), or the parallel between the equality and mutuality specific to the divine love between God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the growing of love towards marriage in betrothal (Thatcher, *Living Together*, 232–6).

These theological arguments also address another suspicion – that the problematic character of family results from its Christian origins. Cahill and Thatcher acknowledge this. Christian views have had detrimental effects on how sex, gender, relationships and family have been experienced. They also point to less well-known Christian ideas that can be used to develop alternative views. At these two levels, Cahill and Thatcher aim to overcome the controversial status of family by showing how it can be understood in new ways inspired by elements from both contemporary ideals and Christian sources.

This way of addressing the topic of the family can also be seen in other studies in theological ethics. Family is often discussed in relation to concrete, contemporary problems and not so much as a general theme by asking what family is about, what it stands for in our time and confronts us with, what is difficult about it. Family is in principle regarded as a good, more than in the philosophical ethical approaches analysed earlier. Family is the context or structure that can shape a good approach to the concrete moral issues of sex and procreation, gender and partner relations. In that sense, family is a solution to moral problems. To be able to function like this, family needs to have a specific character. Christian ethics helps to outline this character with a special recourse to the Christian tradition.[73]

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[73] Three recent examples of this type of theological reflection on family show the diversity of its elaborations. Susannah Cornwall (*Un/familiar Theology: Reconceiving Sex, Reproduction and Generativity*, Rethinking Theologies: Constructing Alternatives in History and Doctrine, Vol. 1 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017)) calls her method 'un/familiar' theology. It aims to discuss contemporary family-related moral problems by opening up 'the familiar' and especially its aura of absoluteness or unchangeability by unfamiliar perspectives. These perspectives arise both from family practices and from their reflection in ethical theory. She uses the themes of generativity and natality as lenses because they are helpful in critically discussing the limits of the focus on what is 'natural' or 'biological' in family life. While Cornwall's sympathy is clearly with the new, unfamiliar family practices and reflection, legal historian John Witte Jr. points out 'the continued value and validity of traditional family values in modern liberal democracies dedicated to sexual liberty and equality' (*Church, State, and Family: Reconciling Traditional Teachings and Modern Liberties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019), xiii). He reconstructs traditional Christian views

There has always been a tension in the Christian tradition between the moral weight of what can be called the natural family and the family of God. This tension can already be seen in the synoptic sayings of Jesus that construct an opposition between doing God's will and following Jesus on the one hand and loyalty to family members on the other.[74] In recent theological ethics one also finds authors who focus completely on this opposition in their reflection on the moral status of family. Thus, they address a different controversy about family, with a different reason for suspicion. Here family is suspected of having too much moral weight and obstructing the view of and attachment to the true community, that of the believers, or the church.[75]

Several ethicists point out that what characterises a Christian view is a relativisation of the importance of family and having children in favour of that of the 'new' family of believers formed in Christ.[76] They criticise

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on the interweaving of sex, marriage and family, and of the relatedness of family, church and state for today's liberal democratic societies. A recent Roman Catholic volume edited by Julie Hanlon Rubio and Jason E. King starts from the longing for new reflection that takes into account the 'wealth and insights of the Catholic tradition' but does not remain trapped in the old oppositions related to the papal documents of the twentieth century (*Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020), 4). It aims to be more attentive to the specific moral difficulties of current family life, including, for example, the challenges of social media, which shape images of what relationships and sexuality should be, the life–work balances of parents, the power balance between partners, the nature of love and the durability of relationships. It proposes to do so by asking 'new questions' which point to the fundamental level of the values and virtues at stake in these difficulties.

[74] These are the passages in which Jesus opposes the self-evidence of 'who are my mother and my brothers' (Mark 3:31–35, Matt. 12:46–50, Luke 8:19–21), or points out that one cannot love one's family members above himself (Matt. 10:37) or cannot be his disciple if he or she does not hate them (Luke 14:26).

[75] That this is a different controversy is clearly seen when we compare it to the debate in which Cahill (*Sex, Gender*) is engaged. She also refers to the anti-familial tendencies in early Christianity and later traditions as countercultural but focusses on its potential to promote equality within and between families instead of taking it as a reason to fundamentally relativise the importance of family.

[76] Brent Waters localises this approach in his third category of 'critical adaptation' and labels it 'church as first family' (Waters, *The Family*, 121–6). Under this heading, he refers to the view of Rodney Clapp (*Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), who argues that family should be modelled after the church, which means a relativising that is in the end enriching. He embeds marriage as a covenant in the larger community. In a recent overview article on Christian family views, Thatcher points out the parallel between Clapp's 'American evangelical Protestant' view and those of feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether: both point to the subversive character of Jesus' and Paul's teachings on family and the community of believers. The parallel ends where Ruether argues for a pluralist understanding of family ('Families', in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. by Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 590–607, at 597). Thatcher also points out the likeness to Jana Bennett's 'neo-Augustinian' view that emphasises that it is by baptism and not by their natural family ties that believers receive their identity. It is on the basis of this relationship to God that people participate in their diverse households (Jana Bennett, *Water Is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (Oxford: Oxford University

theological and church views for adopting the popular glorification of romantic love and of having children and endowing them with both the aura of a natural desire and a divine purpose.[77] These critical views all include a moment of stepping back and asking what is at stake in the topic of the family. But their analyses of the current approach to family are from the start framed by their theological suspicion. In that sense, they are part of the controversy and not so much open investigations of what family is about. Less radical forms of this theological approach only limit the importance of family by giving it the status of a 'domestic church' that is needed within the larger church community. This again means, however, that it is supposed to be clear what family is about and that it is something good.[78]

Our study is different regarding this self-evident starting point. We acknowledge that family is an everyday reality for most people and to that extent it is something obvious. The value of a good family life that makes its members flourish is also beyond dispute. On the other hand,

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Press, 2008)). From this perspective she criticises the over-attention to and idealisation of family in many contemporary Christian views.

[77] For example, Michael Banner argues that, from a Christian perspective, one should be critical of the current Western climate, which sanctions the longing for having children 'of one's own', and healthy ones in particular, as a 'natural' need that should be satisfied at almost any cost and, accordingly, regards involuntary childlessness as an experience of immense tragedy and desperation (*The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapters 2 and 3). Stanley Hauerwas analyses the present status of family as paradoxical in that it is economically marginalised, and superseded by 'public education' on the one hand while romantically idealised as and regarded as providing an 'anchor' in times of instability on the other. For a counterview, he refers to the equalisation of marriage and being 'single' from early Christianity onwards ('Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians Are Doing It' (1978), and 'The Radical Hope in the Annunciation: Why Both Single and Married Christians Welcome Children' (1998), in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 481–518). For an application of similar critiques – focussed on the modern, romantic, heteronormative view of marriage – to discussions on divorce, women's ordination and homosexuality in Dutch Orthodox Reformed churches, see Marco Derks, Pieter Vos and Thijs Tromp, 'Under the Spell of the Ring: The Role of Marriage in Moral Debates among Orthodox Reformed Christians in the Netherlands', *Theology and Sexuality* 20/1 (2014): 37–55. From a Roman Catholic perspective, David Matzko McCarthy addresses the romantic focus on intimacy and love of the partners regarding its economic and political consequences. He proposes the 'open household' as an alternative that places the nuclear family within a larger social context of a 'neighbourhood economy'. He identifies this 'social vocation' of personal relations as the heart of Catholic social teaching (*Sex and Love in the Home*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2004), 11).

[78] Thatcher categorises this 'domestic church' view of family as characteristic of Roman Catholic theology from Vatican II onwards, in particular confirmed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and subsequently developed into a view which gives family and church the same high status ('Families', 597–9). For Waters, these Catholic teachings are the 'resistance' form of Christian views on family which reasserts traditional dogma over against late liberal family views and practices (Waters, *The Family*, 105–15).

family is highly disputed: it is reviled and glorified. In distinction to the theological approaches we have already mentioned, our way of dealing with this controversial status is not to point to the dangers of family life and tap new, Christian sources of meaning to rehabilitate family. We think that it is important to open up the fundamental question of what family might mean and to reflect on what seems to be obvious or intuited. Doing so implies moments of distancing and estrangement from what seems obvious, and some confidence that a new understanding beyond the frames inherent in current controversies is possible.

The Mystery Approach of This Book

In this book we want to achieve the moments of distancing and gaining new insights by analysing various academic debates and literary or artistic expressions about family up to the points where they reach their limits of clarification – points where ambiguities, inconsistencies or ambiguities arise. It is precisely at such points, where it appears that family cannot – as in the views just discussed – easily be seen as a solution to other problems and as something good, that the beginnings of an awareness of the specific nature of family itself, as well as of its inscrutability and unnameability, can be found.

These are the moments when reflection reaches an impasse which is, in the end, not a failure but points to the need for a different approach. We will try to interpret such impasses as openings to approach family as mystery. To put it in Marcel's terms, these are the moments when reflection 'bows humbly' to life as a mystery that cannot be understood but only recognised in faith. In line with Marcel's view, becoming aware of family as mystery is not an end point but a starting point for constructive reflection, a reweaving of what has become separated in the problem approaches. It enables reflection that does not aim to analyse family by demarcating it into different, clearly identifiable problematic aspects in order to solve them, but by being directed at family as a whole. This approach assumes an initial negative moment of 'critical reflection on ordinary conceptual reflection' to discover the nodes where it gets stuck and thus points to the need for an alternative way of thinking.[79] In this way, the realm of mystery has opened up. We also discovered the ethical character of this reflection – it aims at actions that correspond to the awareness of mystery. To conclude this chapter, we will outline how this reweaving from negative to positive or critical to constructive moments will take shape in this book.

[79] For Sweetman's analysis of Marcel, see note 53 of this chapter.

The Need for a Variety of Sources

As indicated, the central foci that direct this reweaving will be those of givenness and dependence. These are aspects that pose difficulties in our time with its dominant ideals of independence, freedom and equality. We want to try to overcome this friction, not by creating a view of family that is partly compatible with these ideals and partly nuanced, but by exploring how the analysis of family itself can lead to a different kind of understanding of these difficult aspects. We noted that speaking about family in general, as in formulations like 'the family itself' or 'family as such', is risky given the enormous diversity of family life. We will pay attention to this risk at every step of our reflection. At this point, it is important to emphasise once more that we do not use this speaking in general terms to suggest that there is only one true form of family life but to explore whether there are specific characteristic 'constants' in family, to use Marcel's term. We want to find a way of thinking about family as a whole. Before being able to deal with our central 'constants' of givenness and dependence, we therefore have to address the crucial, critical issue of whether it is possible to approach family as a distinct sphere of its own. We will start with this issue in Chapter 2 and deal with givenness and dependence in Chapters 3 and 4.

When we highlighted givenness and dependence as central constants of what it means to be family, we indicated we are using these terms in a neutral sense so that we do not become part of the current controversies between opponents and advocates of family or those between worried and relieved researchers. In our investigations in the next chapters, we cannot, however, avoid these controversies. Some of the authors we will analyse are clear representatives of the suspicion of family, while others are strong advocates and assume the self-evident goodness of family, are worried about its current state and aim to retrieve what has been lost.

We have selected authors who do not completely submerge themselves in these polarised debates and take a hard position. Rather, they also have points of contact with opposed views, often surprisingly. In contemporary studies, family mainly gets attention in a general sense in those that are fed by criticism and suspicion, as may be expected from the fact that the aspects of givenness and dependence are contentious issues. Nineteenth-century thinkers on family will turn out to be valuable in finding representatives of a different, constructive moral reflection, in particular, Hegel and Schleiermacher. They address the topic of family when dealing with the issue of personhood and becoming a self, and a moral self in particular. In

their view, family is indispensable for developing morality. Moreover, Hegel's view of family as a moral community is fiercely discussed among contemporary philosophers, particularly in relation to feminist views. In Chapter 2, therefore, we will create a coherent cluster of authors who relate to Hegel and also read Hegel himself. In the other chapters, there is no clustering around such a central figure but one based on the respective themes. The aim in all the chapters is to create a dialogue between critical and constructive voices in view of the aforementioned impasses which may serve as openings for a mystery approach.

Another way to avoid becoming involved in the polarised controversies and to find alternative views beyond the ossified positions is to go beyond academic reflection by starting from literary texts and artistic expressions. The very difficulty of naming the specific character of family already prompts one to consult a variety of sources. Marcel states: '[T]he kind of writer who makes the mystery of the family palpable to us is always, for example, the novelist rather than the historian of social institutions.'[80] This may be explained in various ways. The mystery character might be better accounted for in the ambiguous, poetic language of literature than in the objectifying language of reflection which aims to be clear and univocal.

That does not mean that a reflective approach is not valuable. Conceptual knowledge is necessary for describing and understanding what family could mean; a certain degree of objectivity is always required, but its possibilities are limited and have to be broadened by including input from other sources of meaning beyond the academic context. Moreover, approaching family as mystery, as Marcel understands it, means that family is an issue in which the researcher is always involved and can therefore never be completely understood in terms of a detached, objective analysis.

This involved character of the investigation is another reason to look for sources outside of academic reflection. The study of such involved topics like family has to account for the difficulty that people are not transparent to themselves. A method of inquiry that gives one direct access to oneself is not available. Literary sources speak from the inside in the sense that they are situated expressions that tell a specific family story. By opening each chapter with such a literary or artistic expression, we want to 'evoke' – to use Marcel's expression – the issue under discussion in such a way that one identifies with it more or less in a way that is more involved, personal or existential than detached, analytical or conceptual.

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[80] Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 204.

For this reason, we started our study with a first 'evocation' of what family is about in the form of Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*. Here we see how people live their family life as something obvious in spite of the fact that it is all but obvious what family might mean. Aunt Sylvie self-evidently accepts custody of her teenage nieces whom she has never met and without having any experience in 'housekeeping'. In this situation one niece, Lucille, finally decides to leave and live with a teacher, while the other, Ruth, stays with Sylvie, living as a transient, daydreaming about a reunion with Lucille. It is particularly when family ties are under pressure, when they are not self-evident, that the meanings of family come to light, as is the case after Lucille's departure. A brief evocation of this family story resulted in an awareness of the specific meaning and power of the family tie without being able to name this meaning in an exact way or indicate how it should be morally evaluated.

In the following chapters, we will start in a similar way with an analysis or close reading of a literary or artistic source. We will do so by giving room to the source itself to tell a story about a specific kind of family experience, as we did in the Prologue. These sources will bring us close to actual family life and challenge to re-enact in ourselves the meanings we find in these stories. Only then will we go into existing interpretative studies of these sources.

To evoke the theme of Chapter 2, that of family as a distinct sphere, captured in the notion of the family tie, we will turn to Sophocles' play *Antigone*. Antigone buries her brother in violation of the official ban and then has to pay for this act with her death. This ancient Greek tragedy keeps coming up in the history of thinking about the moral status of family up to the present. This rich reception shows that *Antigone* gives a strong impression of what it might mean to be a family. On the other hand, it does not give a straightforward answer to this question. The family members respond differently to the appeal of the family tie. Antigone is the one who acts on the basis of the family tie. The other members do not at first, but in the end they change position and do acknowledge the weight of the family tie. Antigone herself also experiences moments of doubt.

Again, as in *Housekeeping*, we will discover how a story makes us aware of family as a specific moral sphere without emphatically making this explicit at a meta level. The story gives rise to the question of what family means. Family duties are not clearly formulated, but family does give a strong impulse for acting. This acting leads in the end to Antigone's own death, which gives rise to the question of whether family is morally dangerous. A detailed reading of *Antigone* will be undertaken in Chapter 2 to evoke different aspects of the tie with an eye to their unnameable character. This

will also give new impulses for elaborating the approach to family as a mystery, in particular because Antigone presents her duty towards her deceased brother as a divine demand.

In Chapter 3 we explore the theme of the given character of family by starting from the artistic imagery of the Holy Family, in particular two paintings by Rembrandt. One painting seems to present nothing but an ordinary family. As such, it gives rise to the question of how givenness in the sense of this ordinary scene may have a surplus of meaning, even at the level of revealing the sacred. This question will be elaborated by taking into account the specific character of this painting as a so-called 'strong image', which means that it presents itself as an image and not as a copy of reality or a simulation.

The question, finally, of whether and how the meanings of a given family tie may be specified by the notion of dependence will be evoked in Chapter 4 by analysing the family imagery of the biblical prophecy of Hosea. The character of this imagery is a peculiar one because Hosea has to embody the image; he is summoned to actually start an 'adulterous family' with the woman Gomer. This family is to be a living image in the prophetic call to God's unfaithful people to repent. As an image, it brings to light a broader, even fundamental, dependence that should be acknowledged as rooted in God. The critical power of this prophetic 'call to acknowledge' is analysed with respect to the meanings of family it may reveal.

At the start of each chapter, we will give room to the stories of these works of arts themselves, but we do so with the specific focus on the theme at hand. This focus implies of course a specific interpretation of the stories. Second, we will account for this interpretation and relate it to others that sometimes differ from it to a great degree. This leads to debates in which the controversial status of family once again comes into play – interpreting these artworks as shedding light on what family means is in itself questionable. This is another point on which we cannot avoid the current controversies about family. We aim to get beyond the polarised oppositions and deadlocks that result from it by first letting the works of art tell their stories apart from the debates and then return in the rest of the chapters to the meanings thus evoked, bringing them into dialogue with the voices from the reflective, academic debates.

Close Reading to Evoke the Impasse and Get beyond It

This approach, which consists of giving ample space to the stories themselves and reading them closely, will also be applied in the case of the academic literature. As we indicated, the mode of mystery requires a reading,

understanding and reflection that is attentive to the impasse. This impasse may be the result of the paradoxical combination of a revelation of meaning and an awareness of its unnameability. Impasses may be moments when, for example, apparently clear categorisations turn out to be ambiguous or where an argument is not completed or inconsistent, or much more subtle than expected on the basis of a polemic, robust opening.

Only by giving enough space to the argument of the author is it possible to trace such moments. This 'borehole' reading asks the reader to be willing to go the long route of examining each text in detail without anticipating the outcome. As with weaving, different threads must first be set up before others can be pulled through them to create a pattern. That is why the sources are consulted on the basis of the central questions of the present study, but they also need to be put into context. For the literary and artistic sources (*Antigone*, Rembrandt, Hosea) and classical authors (Hegel, Schleiermacher), this means that central and contemporary interpretations of these sources are discussed as well. Other recent academic texts are analysed as parts of larger academic debates; they show how family is experienced and interpreted nowadays in Western academic circles.

Through this detailed, 'borehole' reading, we aim to discover moments that evoke a sense of mystery. Of course, we will also come across moments in which this awareness of mystery is lacking. We will investigate both moments as to their consequences for the controversial character of the family debate to test whether a mystery approach may indeed help to get beyond it.

In the case of Chapter 2 a first impasse arises from the reading of *Antigone*. The story can be read as giving insight into family as a distinct moral sphere, which is experienced as something that brings with it specific responsibilities. In current reflection on this issue, Hegel is a classic reference point; as he also mentions *Antigone*, the reception of the two texts is often intertwined. It is a critical reception, however. This criticism is directed precisely at our initial formulation of the distinct character of family as a tie of dependence.

Another reason to take this criticism into account is that it gives insight into what is currently at stake in the topic of family. We will focus on Judith Butler's interpretations. She accuses approaches that ask about the distinct nature of family of suggesting an unchanging essence of family that is outside the political sphere of influence, while in fact adopting dominant, hetero-normative images. In the case of Hegel's reading of *Antigone* this also means that he cannot, in the end, account for Antigone's autonomous, rebellious acting. A more constructive, positive argument in Butler's thinking points out the moral importance of the fundamental interdependence of all life. However, it is precisely this positive argument that creates an impasse

because, for Butler and other feminist thinkers, family cannot be a context for discovering such interdependence. We will read Hegel himself to gain a better understanding of why Hegel does approach family as the primary locus of morality. Compared to many other readings of Hegel, we will bring more to light how Hegel sees family as characterised by the ambiguity between nature and morality, the pre-reflective and, to that extent, unnameable character of moral duty, as well as its sacredness. These aspects resonate with the understanding of family as mystery and will be investigated as to their value in getting beyond the opposition between essentialist and other approaches.

In Chapter 3 we will build on these aspects of the pre-reflective and sacred character by means of a more specific focus on the given character of the family tie. Here, an even more pronounced and polarised impasse emerges. There are clear advocates and opponents of an understanding of family as given. The central focus of this debate is the interpretation of the family tie as 'natural'. Advocates are found in recent family ethics and opponents in the new kinship anthropology which emphasises that kinship is always a cultural construct.

By analysing in detail different voices from these disciplines our aim is not just to gain insight in the shortcomings of the view of family as natural but also to understand why the language of the natural nevertheless persistently returns both in ethical theory and in the current kinship practices anthropology analyses. This latter effort to understand the persistence is hardly found among the anthropological opponents of biological views, due to their fiercely polemical attitude. This observation confirms the controversial character of the topic of family but also indicates the need to get beyond the impasse of 'nature' versus 'culture', or 'given' versus 'made' in order to make sense of what family could mean. Surprisingly, both advocates and opponents of family perceived as 'natural' will help us do so because their arguments also contain elements that are, luckily, not entirely consistent with their positions. The analysis of Rembrandt's everyday Holy Family as a so-called 'strong image' provides another way to understand the impasse and change it into a constructive moment. In elaborating these impulses into an alternative view of givenness, the approach to family as mystery will take further shape.

In Chapter 4 the general notion of the givenness of the family tie will be investigated for its openness to further specification. Is it possible to be more specific about this interrelatedness as lived in the context of family? Given our attempt to approach family as mystery, the elaboration of this issue demands caution. We enter into it again at a critical moment, another

impasse. It is found in the contemporary debate in philosophy and ethics on the relational character of being human. This relational nature is often specified in terms of a fundamental, inevitable dependence. Current thinking and societal structures are accused of a lack of awareness of this dependence. In this debate, care rather than family provides access to the topic of dependence, and family is seen as one of the root causes of the problem of the invisibility of dependence. This debate therefore enables us to explore the problems of understanding family as a sphere of dependence. It also provides us with a constructive impulse insofar as it emphasises the importance of acknowledging dependence and regards family as a place where this is lived. This gives us a reason to explore what a constructive combination of the two aspects can yield. Can family also be a phenomenon that reveals what it means to be fundamentally dependent? And does a sensitivity to mystery enable a better understanding of this dependence?

With these questions we address two constructive approaches. The first is Schleiermacher's thinking in which dependence is paramount, in a religious sense as well, and family has a crucial role as the basic moral community. The other is that of the twentieth-century French philosopher Jean Lacroix, who highlights the hidden, non-disclosed character of family and sees this character take shape in a specific act, that of the confession of both love and guilt. Introducing mystery into the analysis of these debates can help us gain insight into the limits of these constructive specifications as well as with their critical potential to reveal why dependence is at present such a difficult notion.

Finally, in the Epilogue we will take stock of our attempt to understand what family is about in the mode of mystery instead of problem. We will do this by separately reconsidering the critical and constructive nature of a mystery approach that implies a feeling for the sacred. This reflection will refer to the experience of a moral claim which inescapably forces itself upon us and which may therefore be called sacred. Family seems to be the pre-eminent context in which such a claim may be experienced and answered. Its incorporation into ethical reflection presupposes an attitude of attentiveness to the sacred similar to that implied in a mystery approach. In conclusion we will indicate what such a theological ethics looks like in a brief analysis of the double 'confession' of both love and guilt that Lacroix highlights as characteristic of family.

The Family Tie as Mystery

The aim of this chapter is to provide our investigation with enough focus to enable the ethical analysis of what family is about while also respecting its nature as mystery. In the foregoing, we have discovered that it is not easy to name what family might mean. A great deal of family research assumes that the meaning of family is already known: it is regarded as self-evident and is not usually a subject of investigation. In everyday life, family members do not usually refer to it explicitly either. Rather, meaning comes to light in different experiences and ways of acting without being named. Following our first explorations of the novel *Housekeeping*, we noticed that it is particularly when it is under pressure and not self-evident that what it means to be family members becomes visible – when, for example, family members are missing due to death or other causes or when the duties implied in being part of a family are not taken up as a matter of course. Moreover, in these difficult situations, family is experienced differently by the various members. No general definition can be given of what it means or what kind of behaviour it implies. Nevertheless, it is a way of being related that is often important for how people understand themselves. It is a connectedness that usually implies some kind of responsibility. The family tie is something to which people are answerable and can be called to account, even though members may differ on what it implies concretely. In this chapter, we will reflect critically on this first, tentative formulation of the tie. It suggests that family is a distinct sphere with a logic of its own, also as regards morality. This suggestion might seem obvious, but at present it is contentious. The most important criticism is that it suggests a uniformity that does not correspond to the enormous variety of family life. Thus, it can surreptitiously introduce a normative standard of family life without leaving room for discussion. By analysing this criticism, not only will we be challenged to account for our approach; we will also gain further insight into what is at stake in current controversies on family.

Let us first explain our initial reasons for choosing the term 'family tie' as a starting point to further explore what family might mean and the question of whether this is a distinct field of meanings. 'Family tie' is a fixed expression in ordinary language. The reference to the relationship as a 'tie' seems specific to family and not to other relationships. One does not usually speak of friendship ties, neighbourhood ties or citizenship ties. Again, this does not mean that the family tie is referred to very often by, for example, pointing it out to others who do not experience it or invoking it as a justification of certain acts or statements. Precisely because it is usually not made explicit, this notion seems an apt one for retaining its character as mystery. On the other hand, the term 'family tie' also indicates that being a family means something. This meaning can be expressed in acting or be presupposed in holding someone responsible for something, such as becoming a guardian, as happens in *Housekeeping*. A third aspect is that speaking in terms of a tie is quite compatible with the open view of family introduced in Chapter 1. Family is present where a family tie is experienced, be it in a positive or negative sense. Moreover, focussing on the family tie does not lead to the 'problem approaches' we discussed in Chapter 1. Nor does it display a sense of worry. Finally, in ordinary language, the notion of a family tie has an obvious association with something that is not chosen, but given.

In Chapter 1, we explained why we will start each of the chapters with an analysis of a literary or artistic expression of family. When looking for a literary text that can evoke an experience of a family tie in such a way that the reader can re-enact it, Sophocles' *Antigone* seems an obvious candidate. The classic interpretation of Antigone as acting on a family tie is aptly represented by an entry in the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism*:

> ANTIGONE. The strong-willed daughter of Oedipus of Thebes. In defiance of the edict of Creon she performed funeral rites for her slain brother Polynices, who was regarded as an enemy of the state. Entombed alive as a punishment for her disobedience she hung herself. She was a courageous and eloquent champion for the rights of the family against the dictates of the state.[1]

According to such a summary, the play may appear to be a proper expression of the specific character of the family experienced as a matter of family ties. The play then shows first of all the strength of the family tie. The bond is so strong that the question of whether it should be respected or honoured

[1] Janet K. Boles and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 52.

hardly arises for Antigone. Its strength is obvious and overrules any other consideration, even that of staying alive. The tie extends as far as the dead and can be expressed in symbolic acts like burying a family member. This family logic is different from that of the state or civil society. The incompatibility of these spheres is shown in the clash of two moralities.

The number of recent studies inspired by *Antigone* is immense. Not all of them, however, focus on the theme of family.[2] Reading *Antigone* with a view to family is thus a specific kind of reading – although a very dominant one, judging by the formulation just cited. The most important origin and source of inspiration for this reading is found in the interpretation the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) gave of *Antigone* in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel refers to *Antigone* in sections on the meaning of family and the specific morality related to this sphere of life. The characterisation of Antigone as a 'champion for the rights of the family' is a widely held summary of Hegel's view. Consequently, a large number of recent studies of *Antigone* are thus in dialogue with this interpretation. As we will see, the character of this dialogue is very critical, even deconstructive. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that both Hegel and recent interpretations regard *Antigone* as a literary source that has a specific value in reflecting on what family might mean. To that extent, they fit in with our approach of consulting literary and artistic sources to broaden the scope of our reflection.

In the analysis that follows, we will look at Sophocles' *Antigone* itself, for reasons indicated in Chapter 1. In the process of interpreting *Antigone*, however, it will become apparent that our initial idea of the core meanings of this literary text will need to be adjusted. The play does not lend itself to be used to evoke the experience of a family tie in the way we expected. The feminist dictionary summary of Antigone as a champion who reveals the strength of the family tie will turn out to be all too direct and simple. The issue of the family tie is indeed raised by the play, but not in the sense of having clear meanings. The play may be said to evoke the topic of the family tie, but not in the sense of an indisputable fact that implies certain rights and duties. The family tie is presented as much more ambiguous and complex than presupposed at the start. The fruits of this discovery will be given in the analysis of the play in this chapter, which we undertake in

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[2] Bonnie Honig observes a 'turn to Antigone in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first', which she explains as a countering of 'certain forms of sovereignty and rationality' (Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1). The interests of recent interpretations are as different as the big questions of 'agency, power, sovereignty and sexuality'.

a rather direct way. We approach the play with the questions that arise from the focus of this study, and we expect that it will have something valuable to say. This is not to be seen in the sense that it presents some model of what family should or should not be, but we hope it will yield other insights into what family might mean. For interpreters who start from a historical understanding of the text, this may be an all-too-straightforward approach. They will emphasise the incomparability of family then and now. We think comparison is possible because our aim is modest. We do not claim to give some new or final interpretation of Sophocles' work. We will read the text carefully as a literary unit and thus aim to avoid letting the text say what we want. As long as we account for our questions and interpretations in critical dialogue with others, it is possible to let our thinking and experiencing be challenged and enriched by this literary means of evoking possible meanings of family – both expected and unexpected, appealing and irritating. Analysing this literary text will let us experience meanings in ways that other, more conceptual texts cannot. Of course, the meanings we find will depend on the questions we ask. We will discuss the legitimacy of these questions in dialogue with other interpretations of *Antigone* in the sections after the first analysis of the story itself.

Family Ties in Sophocles' *Antigone*

Being Sisters

'Ismene, sister of my blood and heart' (1)[3] – it is with this emphatic, double appeal to their relation that Antigone opens the play.[4] Two women are on the stage in front of a palace, immediately revealed to be sisters. This

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[3] References in the main text between brackets are to the numbering of the lines of the Greek text and its translation in the *Loeb Classical Library* Series (Vol. 21) by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Sometimes there are references to the edition by Mark Griffith (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)); this will be indicated.

[4] This form of address (Ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον) is unusual in ancient Greek and hard to capture in a different language. Another translation tries: 'My own sister Ismene, linked to myself, are you aware that . . . '. On the difficulty of this passage, compare Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986; republ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63; Bonnie Honig, 'Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*', *Arethusa* 44/1 (2011): n. 41, referring to Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Anna Papile, *Sisters and Greek Tragedy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2016), n. 3, refers to Simon Goldhill, 'Antigone and the Politics of Sisterhood', in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141–62, at 145–6 (see also chapter 9 in Goldhill's monograph on Sophocles, *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 231–48). See also

sisterhood is apparently something to be explicitly appealed to and thus not entirely self-evident. The appeal to their relation as sisters or family is continued in the rest of Antigone's opening phrases, but accompanied throughout by a sense of tension. First, she emphasises their joint sorrowful state, which they share as descendants of Oedipus. Immediately afterwards, however, she calls this shared fate into question: in an address replete with rhetorical questions, she almost accuses Ismene of not being aware of the latest disaster to affect their family. One hears the guilt insinuated in the far from neutral or open question: 'Do you not realize that our enemies' evils are approaching those we love (φίλους)?' (9–10, Griffith 122–3). Ismene does not respond to the references to sisterhood and family history, or to the accusing tone. She replies in a rather detached and calm way: 'To me no word has come ... I know nothing further, nothing that improves my fortune or brings me nearer to disaster' (11, 16–17). Obviously, Antigone responds indignantly that this is precisely what she thought and why she has summoned Ismene out of the gates of the courtyard – to inform her about a new, imminent danger: 'Why, has not Creon honoured one of our brothers and dishonoured the other in the matter of their burial?' (21).[5] The one, Eteocles, has received proper burial 'in accordance with justice and with custom' (24) while the corpse of the other, Polynices, was to be left 'unwept for, unburied, a rich treasure house for birds as they look out for food' (26–30). Whoever violates this edict will be stoned to death (36).

   It is not just to inform her sister that Antigone wishes to speak to her. Rather, she explains the situation as one in which she may show whether 'her nature is noble' or that she is 'the cowardly descendant of valiant ancestors' (37–8). Ismene, however, perseveres in her ignorance and powerlessness: 'What could I contribute by trying to untie or to tie the knot?' (39–40). Thus, Antigone is forced to make explicit what is completely obvious in her eyes but what she now has to present as a request: 'Will you bury the dead man, together with this hand of mine?' (43). By now, Ismene's answer is all but a surprise: 'Are you thinking of burying him, when it has been forbidden by the city?' This is the moment for Antigone to confirm explicitly the distinction between them that was hinted at from the very first line as contradicting the emphasis on their unity as sisters: 'I will bury my brother, and yours, if you will not; I will not be caught

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Nussbaum (*The Fragility*, 63–4) and the translation by Griffith (*Antigone*, 40–1) on the centrality of the issue in *Antigone* of whether family members are one's friends (φίλοι) or enemies.
[5] The small words introducing another rhetorical question by Antigone – 'has not ... ?' (οὐ γὰρ ... ;) – again accuse Ismene of not being aware of the most recent family disaster. Antigone refers to Creon's law as things 'the people say', which also suggests that Ismene could have known about it (23, 27, 31).

betraying him' (45–6). Ismene is set apart as a traitor because of her refusal to do what a sister should do for a brother.

Then it is Ismene's turn to appeal to sisterhood in order to keep Antigone from doing this 'reckless' (47) deed: 'Woe! Think sister' (49). Like Antigone a moment ago, although in vain, Ismene now starts referring to their family's history, the terrible fate of their father and mother after the revelation of the scandalous character of their incestuous marriage and the fate of their brothers as well, 'on one day killing each other' (55). Now, only the two of them are left – women, moreover, 'who are ruled by those whose power is greater'. They cannot do anything but obey these powers who forbid to bury. It is foolish to go against what exceeds one's powers, she argues (67). At the same time, however, Ismene begs the dead for understanding, which implies that she does feel the claim of Antigone's plea. Antigone, in reply, takes Ismene's appeal to sisterhood and family fate as nothing more than an expression of her subjectively choosing to be a certain 'kind of person' (71) and thus of her distancing herself from the rest of the family. Antigone claims her own decision to bury her brother and the death penalty that will result from it to be 'honourable' (72), 'a crime that is holy' (74), while accusing Ismene of taking 'pleasure' in the 'dishonouring of what the gods honour' (76–7). Ismene does not take pains to defend herself against these accusations but pities Antigone's sorrowful fate that is the result of 'being in love with the impossible' (90). Antigone then counters by expressing her hatred of Ismene for saying this and claiming again the honourableness of her own imminent death. The final words are, surprisingly, granted to Ismene, who suddenly puts herself in the role of the one whose consent is requested in deciding on a difficult dilemma. She utters a judgement: 'Well, if you wish to, go! But know this much, that in your going you are foolish, but truly dear to those who are your own (φίλοις[6])' (98–9). Ismene now claims to speak on behalf of the 'dearest', the family, and still includes Antigone and herself among them. Thus, the opening dialogue ends up in a rupture between the sisters while they both claim their kinship as well.

Burial of a Traitor as a Family Issue

The family tie is clearly brought to the fore from the start in this opening scene. The central dilemma of the play – the question of whether a traitor, Polynices, deserves to be buried even when the lawful government forbids

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[6] Griffith also gives another possible translation: 'because you are truly devoted to kin you are behaving impossibly' (*Antigone*, 138).

it – is presented from the outset as the issue of burying a brother, a family member and not just any traitor. Antigone presents the responsibility for paying one's final honours as something belonging to them as sisters or family members as they are the only direct relatives left in the Oedipus family. It is remarkable that Antigone brings this duty forward as self-evident and does not try to underpin it by giving explicit reasons for it or to refer to a law-like formulation. Ismene, for her part, does not try to solve the problem by putting the responsibility on others, perhaps those outside the family circle – an option Creon suggests later in the play.[7] She disagrees with Antigone's decision to bury Polynices, but not with the sisterly obligation to do so as such, and even begs the dead for understanding regarding her negligence.

Despite the fact that this sisterly or familial duty appears self-evident, Antigone also assumes from the start that Ismene will not take up this task and is thus somehow insensitive to the obviousness of this duty. From the beginning, Antigone casts doubt on her sister's solidarity and almost seems to have assumed that this sisterhood will amount to nothing in the end. She does not make much of an effort to convince her sister of her duties towards the dead. Ismene hardly gets the chance to act otherwise. As a result, one wonders why Antigone discusses her plans with Ismene at all. Her own decision is, moreover, already firmly established. Antigone does not seem to need her sister's opinion, advice or consent at all, or to want to consult properly with her so she can finally make up her mind with respect to the burying.

One could easily imagine a different staging of the opening scene, such as a monologue by Antigone revealing the pros and cons of the burial and showing how she finally arrives at her firm decision all alone. Such a monologue does occur further on in the play, where Antigone – in Creon's presence but without entering into a dialogue with him – faces her imminent death and once more reveals her motives. Or one could think of opening with a discussion among the inhabitants of Thebes in which Creon's freshly issued laws are discussed. In the rest of the play, there are several references to the negative reception of these laws among Thebes' citizens and their support of Antigone's decision. Or one might imagine an opening dialogue between Antigone and her fiancé, Haemon, Creon's son. Haemon's position seems full of literary potential since he stands in

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[7] In the next scene, when the crime of burying Polynices has been discovered, Creon explains it as being performed by the guards after having been bribed by 'men in the city who find it hard to bear me' (289–94). This option of others undertaking the task of burying Polynices is not advanced by the sisters, however.

between the laws of the king, his father and the decision of his betrothed. Sophocles does not choose any of these openings, however.

The issue of whether a traitor deserves burial is emphatically staged as a family one. Or, rather, it is a family conflict: the debate about burying is a conflict between sisters who presuppose their sisterhood in the ways they address each other. They give it different content and hardly try to convince each other of their opposed views. They are each other's 'dearest', but also fiercely denounce each other's views and leave it at that. The first scene ends up in complete opposition. Presupposed in this opposition, however, is their bond as sisters and the sisters' duty to bury their brother.

The Disputable Prioritising of the Country above 'Dear Ones'

How is this family conflict elaborated in the rest of the play? The spotlight does not remain on the sisters or on either one of them, but shifts in the next scene to Creon and the chorus of the leading elderly citizens of Thebes. The family setting is changed for the political one. Does this mean an end to the framing of the story in the sisterly obligation to bury? The floor is given first to Creon to introduce himself as the new ruler of Thebes since the death of the two brothers. The introduction ends up in an elaborate reiteration of what he has just proclaimed to the citizens. The laws that order the honouring of Eteocles and prohibit the burying of Polynices are proof of his spirit as a ruler who wants to protect the citizens against ruin and to restore safety. As this recapitulation of the freshly issued laws follows the previous scene in which Antigone attacks the laws, it creates the impression of being a defence against her objections. This impression is reinforced when Creon subsequently contrasts his conduct with that of a bad ruler whom he describes as 'him who rates a dear one (φίλον) higher than his native land' (182–3). This 'dear one' (φίλος) seems a clear reference to Polynices, the son of his sister Iocaste, and to the possibility that Creon would have paid honour to him who is at the same time the one who attacked his 'native land' of Thebes. A few lines later, he says, 'nor would I make a friend (φίλον) of the enemy of my country' (187) as it is only when the country 'prospers [that we] can make friends (φίλους)' (190).

Clear as these statements may be in their prioritising of loyalties to the country above loyalties to 'dear ones', they also reveal another option – that is, favouring your 'dear ones'. In the rest of his speech, moreover, Creon openly seems to reckon with the possibility of a violation of the law against burying Polynices. Apart from having the corpse guarded, he orders the

elderly 'not to give way to those who disobey in this' (219).[8] As a result, the prohibition to bury appears to be disputable from the beginning of the play, most openly in the first scene of course, but also implicitly in this second one in which Creon speaks. This disputability results from the fact that it goes against other obligations, such as those following from a loyalty that weighs more heavily than that of the city, the loyalty to those dear to us (φίλοι). No explicit references are made to sisterhood, which is not surprising, for that would already be giving way to Antigone's claims. Yet the implicit references to the debatable character of the interdict and thus to the presence of some stronger law cannot be missed.

Appealing to Divine Government

In the next scene, then, we seem to see more chances of resuming the thread of the family. Here, a terrified guard informs Creon that Polynices' body has been buried despite the interdict. Without the guards noticing it, somebody has been 'sprinkling its flesh with thirsty dust and performing the necessary rites' (245–7). The burial is presented as a complete mystery by the guard since he emphasises that there are no marks of any activity around the body (249–52). In response to this announcement, nobody suggests that the first to be suspected are Polynices' two sisters. Nobody makes a reference to any obligation to bury a family member.

The first explanation of the enigmatic burial that is put forward is that by the spokesman of the chorus of elderly citizens. He suggests: 'King, my anxious thought has long been advising me that this action may have been prompted by the gods' (278–9). A reference to the gods was also already made briefly by Antigone in the first scene, when she reacted to Ismene's refusal to bury her brother by saying: 'As for you, if it is your pleasure, dishonour what the gods honour!' (76–7). Creon, however, immediately rejects the suggestion by the elderly: 'Cease, before your words fill me with rage, so that you may not be found to be not only an old man but a fool! What you say is intolerable, that the gods are concerned for this corpse! . . . Do you see the gods honouring evil men? It is not so!' (280–9). The extremely vehement character of this response easily creates the impression that there may be some persuasiveness in this explanation with reference to the gods. Creon, however, quickly gives his own view of the miracle: the guards have been bribed by citizens who disagree with

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[8] The elderly, however, seem completely surprised at the very idea of such disobedience and reply: 'there is no one foolish enough to desire death' (220).

Creon's laws (289–94). They will be sentenced to death if they do not find the 'author of this burial' (306).

Despite this harsh response, the suggestion of divine government returns time and again in the rest of the play, not just in relation to miraculous events, but also in relation to the obligation as such to bury one's kin.[9] When Antigone is caught performing the rites for the dead at her brother's body, she refers to this divine law to explain and justify the burial. She opposes this law to Creon's laws and argues that the latter are 'not strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods' (453–5). Several sentences follow in which she further explains the power of these divine laws in comparison to Creon's proclamation (456–61). This is the first time her words sound like an argument to justify her violation of Creon's law.

Her antagonist does not in any way respond to this argument, but follows the suggestion of the elderly that she reminds us of her father as 'she does not know how to bend before her troubles' (472). Creon announces that this stubbornness will lead to her downfall. Antigone embraces this fate, and it is only here that the family tie comes to the fore again. Antigone states she could not 'have gained greater glory than by placing my own (αὐτάδελφον) brother in his grave'.[10] Moreover, she claims this family duty as something 'all these men would approve, if it were not that fear shuts their mouths' (502–5). In comparison to the earlier mentioning of the divine law, this no longer sounds like an argument, a justification, but rather as claiming that her behaviour towards her brother is self-evident to anyone. Of course, Creon rejects this self-evidential character (508) and again points to the traitor status of her brother Polynices (514). Antigone insists that he remains her brother, a 'friend by birth' (523). These final references to the family bond, however, do again not sound like an argument, nor do they explicate any rule – divine or not – that obliges family members to bury their dead. They sound like a claim or statement to remind Creon of the wrongness of his distinguishing between people along the lines of enemies and friends. Creon then concludes that Antigone should die. Apparently, he is not impressed by the claim of divinity that Antigone attaches to her acting, nor by her invocation of the family bond.

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[9] For example, when the guard explains that a dust storm forced them to close their eyes when they wanted to see the attempt to burial: 'we endured the god-sent affliction' (421).

[10] The term αὐτάδελφον used in the opening lines in relation to Ismene is repeated here, compare note 4.

Punished as Sisters

Strikingly, Creon does immediately and self-evidently acknowledge the family tie in his plans to punish the transgression. He includes Antigone's sister Ismene in the death sentence: '[S]he and her sister shall not escape a dreadful death! Yes, I hold her equally guilty of having planned this burial' (488–9). In the very same sentence, he states for the first time his own kinship with the two sisters: '[S]he is my sister's child or closer in affinity than our whole family linked by Zeus of the hearth' (486–7). This kinship is, however, apparently no reason not to sentence both of them to death. Another family tie on the same level is left unmentioned: Creon is himself related to the traitor Polynices – he is his uncle. There is not a single reference to this family bond in the play, although it is on the same level as that of the nieces, which Creon does mention. This absence also puts the family obligation to bury in a different light. Nowhere is this obligation mentioned as applying to Uncle Creon as well. Had it been a family duty, this would have seemed obvious. When people – his son Haimon and the blind prophet Tiresias – later start to contradict Creon in the play, they do not adduce an argument that reminds Creon of his kinship with the traitor either. This suggests that the position of the sisters is a special one as regards this issue of the burial, perhaps because they are closer kin.

When Ismene subsequently enters, Creon gives her the chance to plead not guilty to the burial (534–5). Her reaction is a complete surprise: she admits she has done it (536–7). Instead of Creon following up on this confession with further interrogation, Antigone takes over the conversation by vehemently denying that Ismene had a part in the burial. She invokes 'justice' (538) as going against this and 'Hades and those below' (541) as knowing the facts of the matter – that is, Ismene has 'never put a hand to it' (546–7). Their sisterhood is mentioned only as the background of this rejection: 'I do not tolerate a loved one (φίλην) who shows her love (φιλοῦϲαν) only in words' (543). In her response to Antigone, Ismene does not claim to have carried out the burial. However, she does not deny that she has *not* taken part in the burial either. She explains her pleading guilty as intending to become a 'fellow voyager' (541) in Antigone's suffering and by dying to grant 'the dead man the proper rites' (545). When Antigone states that her own death is enough (547), Ismene asks what kind of life there is for her without Antigone (548). She concludes by saying that their 'offence is equal' (558), to which Antigone counters that Ismene is alive while she herself 'has long been dead, so as to help the dead' (559). These are her last words to Ismene.

This last conversation of the sisters displays a striking change in Ismene's behaviour in comparison to the first scene. She now explicitly endorses her own sisterly duties both to bury her brother and to show solidarity with her condemned sister. Antigone does not respond to this change, but leaves the opposition of the first scene intact. However, this was to be expected. In the first scene, Antigone did already announce to Ismene that 'even if you were willing to act after all I would not be content for you to act with me!' (69–70). Now that this possibility has indeed become real, this reveals again how much Antigone approaches her sister as if she foresees all her characteristic ways of responding. She does not hesitate for a moment when she is finally confronted with Ismene's sudden solidarity, but rejects it immediately. It is important to observe that she does not underpin this rejection by any general statements referring to the family member's obligation to bury, or to the divine laws that command burial. She rejects Ismene's solidarity because it is not in keeping with her earlier decision not to accompany Antigone in the burial of their brother. She does not regard sisterhood as somehow implying a solidarity which might in the end overrule Ismene's earlier refusal and compensate for it. Although she rejects Ismene in this way, she also protects her, of course. In a similar way, there is a moment of protection in Ismene's willingness to share Antigone's terrible fate. While their sisterhood seems to be dominated by opposition, quarrels and rejection, there is clearly also a protective side to this quarrelling. The distance between them does not result in their no longer being concerned about each other, but the opposition dominates the relationship.

Family Ties Denied, Implied in Acts, and Finally Made Explicit

What does the part of the play that follows the burial add regarding the nature of the family tie? The part preceding the burial revealed the family tie to be ambiguous and discordant. It is the basis for the quarrel, the self-evident, unspoken reason for expecting things of each other, especially among the sisters. They expect something from each other precisely because they are sisters: an attitude of solidarity and corresponding concrete acts. These expectations are at the same time tempered by the lack of understanding they show to each other because of their fixed views of the other as either 'cowardly' or 'in love with the impossible'. This lack of understanding leads to an explicit distancing from the other. Still, this is only possible because of the underlying tie.

Subsequently, Creon's perspective dominates, which results in far less emphasis on family. Family is only mentioned as of no importance where enemies of the city like Polynices and, later, Antigone and Ismene are concerned. Moreover, family does not come into view in the first instance when Polynices is found to have been buried. Creon does not associate the crime with Polynices' sisters. Neither does anyone else. When Antigone is caught in the burial act, however, Creon suddenly does take a family perspective and holds the two sisters equally responsible. Ismene agrees to this generalising of the family, but Antigone will have none of it: she rejects her sister's solidarity. Neither of the sisters gives explicit reasons for this solidarity or the refusal of it. They do not refer to, for example, some general law that obliges family members to bury their kin. The only reasons given are the precedence either of the divine law to bury one's dead or of Creon's city laws.

As a result, the meaning of the family tie in all this is far from clear. The play does not simply conjure up the picture of a strong family tie that self-evidently implies specific behaviour. Rather it seems to invite the observer to ponder what this family tie might mean. This invitation does not stem from explicit references to the family tie in words. The tie is rather acted out. This is done most pronouncedly in the burial and in Creon's act of self-evidently including Ismene in Antigone's punishment. Moreover, Ismene's behaviour almost parallels Antigone's readiness to sacrifice herself for kinship when she shows solidarity with her sister as soon as Creon announces she will be punished as well.[11]

The only passage that is incongruous in this respect because it does formulate an explicit obligation to bury one's brother is in Antigone's final speech just before she dies. Here, she suddenly addresses her dead father, mother, and brother directly, anticipating her imminent descent to the underworld and their reuniting. She reminds her mother that she was the one who washed her after she died and paid her the final honours. Now she has to die because she buried her brother! She argues that 'in the eyes of the wise I did well to honour you' (904). The reason she gives for this wisdom has never been mentioned before in the play and suddenly puts the past events in a completely different light.

> For never, had children of whom I was the mother or had my husband
> perished and been mouldering there, would I have taken on myself this task,

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[11] In line with this moment, the suggestion of some interpreters that Ismene is the one who performed the first burial is intriguing. Is Ismene the one who in fact shows more sense of what family means by this first burial and by being prepared to share Antigone's fate? See, for example, Honig, 'Ismene's Forced Choice', 39–44.

in defiance of the citizens. In virtue of what law do I say this? If my husband had died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother and my father in Hades below, I could never have another brother. Such was the law for whose sake I did you special honour, but to Creon I seemed to do wrong and to show shocking recklessness, O my own brother. (905–15)

Now there suddenly turns out to be a law for whose sake she had honoured Polynices. It sounds like a law for siblings only. There is no reference to the divine character of the law, as was claimed earlier. On the contrary, a few lines later, Antigone asks: 'What justice of the gods have I transgressed? Why must I still look to the gods, unhappy one? Whom can I call on to protect me? For by acting piously I have been convicted of impiety' (921–4). The reference to the gods no longer sounds firm and definite but rather hesitant, almost questioning. Firmness is now expressed in the law that obliges siblings to bury their dead because they are irreplaceable for each other.

Unsurprisingly, the Sophoclean authorship of this final passage is disputed, although present scholarship holds that 'there is no convincing evidence that the passage is an interpolation'.[12] A good reason to regard it as authentic is that what this law prescribes corresponds precisely to what Antigone aimed to do from the beginning, and has in fact done: die for burying her brother and refraining from marrying Haimon.[13] On the other hand, there is clearly something odd in the passage. This has to do with the fact that this 'law' has not been mentioned before, although the situations – both in the dialogue with Ismene and in the dialogue with Creon – very much called for it. As a result, the appeal to it in this final section, just before Antigone dies, creates the impression of a rationalisation after the event. As such, it comes across as artificial. It does not sound convincing. It raises the question of whether this is what can happen when one makes explicit the family tie and the obligations implied in it.

Creon's Ruin

After Antigone's speech, no explicit verbal references to any specific family relations are found in the play. Antigone disappears from the scene. The blind prophet Tiresias enters, led by a boy. Tiresias reports that the 'prophetic rites' (1013) which he has performed to gain insight into what

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[12] André Lardinois, 'Antigone', in *A Companion to Sophocles*, ed. by Kirk Ormand (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 55–68, at 63.
[13] Griffith, *Antigone*, 277–9.

should be done have yielded nothing: 'the gods are no longer accepting the prayers that accompany sacrifice or the flame that consumes the thigh bones' (1019–22). Neither do the birds give any signs, for they are 'filled with carrion . . . from the unhappy son of Oedipus who fell' (1016–18). Tiresias urges Creon not to be obstinate but to retrace his steps and stop tormenting the dead man as if he could kill him over again. Creon immediately repudiates this counsel and strikes back by accusing Tiresias of being led by avarice. He debunks Tiresias' interpretation of the divine signs by the brief statement that 'no mortals have power to pollute the gods' (1042–4). Tiresias then feels forced to predict what will come of this – death in Creon's own family. Creon will be left with nothing but outrage and destruction. Tiresias and the boy leave after this ominous announcement, indignant at Creon's insolence.

Then the chorus of elders, representing the citizens of Thebes, immediately confirms the reliability of Tiresias' prophecy, and all of a sudden Creon loses his confidence and expresses his dilemma at having to choose between two evils, those of yielding and resisting. He asks the elders what he should do. They straightforwardly advise him to follow Tiresias' counsel and release Antigone from her tomb and make one for Polynices. Creon immediately gives in, stating that fighting against higher powers is in vain and that it is best to obey the 'established laws' (1105–7). He runs off to personally release Antigone from her imprisonment. In the meantime, a messenger appears and announces Creon's ruin: his son Haemon has been found dead and there seems no other explanation for it than that he has taken his own life. At that very moment, Eurydice arrives and confirms that she has heard of the terrible disaster that has affected her house and asks the messenger to repeat his announcement. He then tells how Creon first paid final honours to Polynices and then went on to Antigone's tomb. When he was close, Creon heard the voice of Haemon and hurried to the scene. There he found Antigone hanging and his son lying with his arms around her and lamenting her death. When Haemon heard his father, he tried to kill him, but Creon escaped. Then Haemon's fury turned against himself; he killed himself. Hearing this, Eurydice leaves without a word. Creon enters, carrying his dead son. His tone is one of confession: his 'mistaken mind' and 'folly' is the cause of this disaster (1261–9). He has only just admitted his mistakes when another messenger enters and announces that his wife has taken her life as well. Creon cries out bewailing his fate, asking why nobody kills him – he, the involuntary murderer of his wife and son who is 'no more than nothing' (1325). The final word comes from the chorus who acclaim 'good sense', wisdom, as the counterpart of impiety to the gods and the 'great words of boasters' (1350).

For the focus of our reading, it is important to see that Tiresias does not in any way refer to the sins of Creon as related to family obligations. His faults, both in burying Antigone alive and leaving Polynices' corpse unburied, are defined only in terms of blasphemy (1066–71). These are also the terms of the chorus who refers to the 'swift avengers from the gods' who will strike Creon if he does not hurry to correct his wrongdoings (1103–4). The notion of family only emerges in connection with the killings. Antigone chooses death after being entombed, and this leads to the death of her betrothed, which in turn leads to the death of Eurydice, his mother. The relationship between husband and wife, Haemon and Antigone, thus parallels that of mother and son, Eurydice and Haemon. Their deaths lead Creon to wish he was dead as well. Without these beloved family members, life for all three of them no longer has any value. Again, this existential importance of the family connections is not made explicit in words but in the acts of suicide or the wish for death.

Antigone and the Family Tie As Mystery

Our analysis of *Antigone* with a specific interest in whether it may reveal meanings of the family tie has shown that the protagonist is not straightforwardly a 'champion of the rights of the family against the dictates of the state'. Antigone does not take pains to defend certain rights, neither in her controversy with her sister nor in her contact with Creon. From the start, she presents herself as the only one sensitive to the implications of this tie. Neither does she try to make the other family members susceptible to it by formulating any explicit family rights or laws. The family tie thus does not seem to function for Antigone as something whose meaning can be formulated in such an explicit way. The same holds for the other members, Ismene and Creon. The meaning of the family tie is thus expressed not as such in words or reflections, but implied in the ways the people act. It becomes visible in how Antigone acts towards her deceased brother and claims the burial as a sisterly duty of divine origin. It is implied in Creon's denial in the justification of his laws and in his punishment of both sisters. It is expressed implicitly in Ismene's sudden solidarity with her sister and in the deaths provoked by Antigone's death. The central issue of the play, the permissibility of the burial, is staged as a family issue from the very start, the opening scene with the two sisters. This staging does not mean the play provides a clear view on the precise nature of the family tie. This tie is a connectedness that is on the one hand self-evident. It is the self-evident basis for calling somebody to account in Antigone's accusations of Ismene and Creon, but

also in how Creon holds both sisters responsible. It is self-evident in that the death of the one family member makes life no longer worth living for the other. But it is not a self-evidence that can be expressed in general rules. The different family members act upon it differently. The family tie turns out to be something about which the different members take a different stand. It is a given tie, but this does not mean one cannot distance oneself from it, as Antigone, Ismene and Creon all do in their own ways.

The play thus certainly evokes the notion of a family tie, but not in an unambiguous way in terms of its meaning. Rather, the conflicts between the family members the spectators are confronted with raise probing questions: What does the family tie mean? What may one expect from family members? Does the tie imply solidarity and unanimity among its members? What kind of behaviour does it imply? Should the tie be regarded as of the kind for which one should sacrifice one's life? That the play evokes the family tie in this questioning way can be related very well to our approach to family as mystery. It evokes it as something that matters, but without presenting it as a phenomenon with a meaning and well-defined status. Nor is it evident what concrete behaviour it demands. The family tie appears as something given, assumed, and not as a fact named as such. This unnamed character does not do away with the appeal that is implied in the tie, even if one chooses to ignore it. Even Creon acknowledges that Ismene and Antigone are his nieces and Polynices a 'dear one'. But this is an appeal he does not respond to – in his view, for the sake of his Thebes. Only after the death of Haemon does he change his mind, but not in the sense of any explicit acknowledgment of the family tie with the two women. In Ismene we observed a change as well: she feels the appeal from the start, but does not respond to it at first. Only after the punishment of Antigone does she turn out to be amenable to it.

It is remarkable that the only qualification Antigone gives of the unnameable law is its divine character and the claim to honour her deceased parents by obeying it. The latter aspect recalls Marcel's view of family as something in which people experience themselves as part of something greater than themselves, in relation to progenitors and future descendants. Antigone shows this larger unity also implies responsibilities related to honouring one's family members. The divine character of the law, moreover, recalls the religious tones of Marcel's approach to family as mystery. In Antigone's formulation, this holy or sacred character of the law has an intrinsic relation to its unnameability, expressed in its unwritten character and unknown origin (456–7). We will return to this sacred character of the law in the final section.

Another aspect of the character of mystery that returns is one's personal involvement. This can be seen in that the family tie is presented precisely as a question to the spectator. It cannot be answered in general but only by determining one's own stance. The play invites the spectator to identify with each of the characters despite the fact that Antigone is the most heroic one. The radical choices she makes and her unwillingness to accept Ismene's solidarity also give her a stubbornness that is alienating. As none of the characters is simply put in the right regarding their family views, the issue is all the more evoked as one that general statements can't be made of.

Our analysis of *Antigone* with a focus on the family tie has thus proved fruitful for a first evocation of the tie. Moreover, it has revealed elements that resonate with the nature of family as mystery and thus gives us a further elaboration of our mystery approach. However, this interpretation of the play as revealing something about the specific character of family is all but self-evident. Although the description from the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* suggests otherwise, it is in particular among scholars with a feminist interest that reading *Antigone* with a focus on family is strongly rejected. Such an interpretation would take a classic dualistic interpretation for granted: as a woman, Antigone stands for the family whereas Creon, the man, represents the state. Not only the gender division, but the splitting of human life into a twofold basic structure of family versus state as such is problematic for many contemporary readers. The debate on the accuracy of this more or less classical interpretation, strongly influenced by what is supposed to be Hegel's view, has not been settled so far. Publications on the topic abound.[14] As a result, the play seems an excellent case for accessing current discussions on the value and meaning of the family tie and of the possibility as such of delineating a tie and a corresponding sphere of human life. The discovery of the aliveness of the debate on these issues is in line with the controversial character of the topic of family in our time, outlined in Chapter 1. Despite all the criticism of the obviousness of the combination of *Antigone* and the theme of family, it remains a topic for reflection. Apparently, Hegel's way of relating the two cannot simply be ignored, in spite of its suggested outdatedness. We will start exploring why this is so and what Hegel's value may be for our own investigations of family by means of a recent reading of *Antigone* by Judith

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[14] For a discussion of the different recent philosophical interpretations, in which Hegel's view remains the most important point of reference, see the contributions to the volume edited by S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė, *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Butler, who is a Hegel scholar as well. In doing so, we will leave the level of the first evocation of family we aimed for by means of the preceding direct analysis of the play itself. Further on in this chapter, we will return to elements from the first evocation.

Judith Butler's Trouble Reading *Antigone* in View of Family

In her Wellek Library Lectures on *Antigone*, Judith Butler opens with an experience similar to our own. In reading the play, the text revealed something different from what she had anticipated.[15] She describes how she started analysing Antigone in the hope of finding in her 'a counter-figure' to recent feminist trends of seeking state support for their aims. Upon reading other interpretations of the play, however, she was struck by the fact that the most influential exegetes, in particular Hegel, interpreted Antigone's role very differently. Instead of seeing Antigone as a political figure, they deemed her a representative of 'kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it' (2). Creon, then, is the representative of state authority. The characterisation from the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* can be easily recognised here. This 'separation of kinship from the social' (3) in traditional interpretations of *Antigone* amazes Butler and guides her rereading of the play. Such a separation relates kinship to the sphere of the pre-political. It becomes a domain where nature reigns, as is obvious in the view of family as defined by blood relation or 'biology'. 'The social', on the other hand, is taken as a denominator for the public sphere of culture, politics, laws and norms. According to Butler, this dualistic interpretation does not do justice to Sophocles' *Antigone*. Moreover, such interpretations in the end contribute to maintaining prevailing social conventions of the human based on an exclusion of the non-human. In particular, they are guilty of supporting traditional forms of kinship and referring alternative forms – like the incestuous relations of Antigone herself – to the level of being 'entombed' as the 'essential and negative feature of the norm' which is itself in fact 'rearticulated' (76).

   Butler's criticism goes to the heart of our reading of *Antigone* and of our project as such – that is, approaching family as a separate phenomenon rooted in an intuitively experienced, unspoken, yet strong family tie. Butler is deeply suspicious of treating family as a distinct sphere which is

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[15] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Wellek Library Lectures 1998 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

somehow self-evidently given in an intuitive experience of feeling a bond with someone. She warns that this approach is always conservative or conformist in the end, which leads to the underestimation or even exclusion of the non-normal. This is reason enough for us to analyse and evaluate her views, but what makes them even more relevant is that Butler is all but unaware of the importance of human relations and the fundamentally interdependent nature of life. In that sense – as she indicates herself – Butler may even be called a Hegelian thinker.[16] She is interested in that which enables the ethical and the political, or better, in the complete interwovenness or entanglement of all forms of life that conditions concrete decision-making, responsibility and acting.[17] The point she emphasises in relation to *Antigone*, however, is that this interest in interdependence should not be elaborated as something outside the political but as itself shaped by politics as well as giving shape to it. To put it in terms of the Hegelian opposition: interest in the inter-human relations of recognition should not lead one in the direction of separating the private from the public – that is, seeing the private as constitutive of the public.[18] That is a misrepresentation because it fails to recognise that the private is already public in the sense that it already contains a contingent, culturally predetermined view of what is human. Although constitutive of the ethical, it is not outside the political and must therefore be recognised as part of the ethical consciousness itself.

  Butler's analysis of Antigone thus reveals two points of emphasis that are also visible in her later works – for example, in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). The first concerns the importance of recognising

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[16] 'I experience my own work as returning time and again to Hegel, to problems of recognition and desire' (Thomas Dumm and Judith Butler, 'Giving Away, Giving Over: A Conversation with Judith Butler', *Massachusetts Review* 49/1–2 (2008): 95–105, at 97). In this context, Butler also refers to her later book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Compare references to Hegel in *Giving an Account*, 24–5, and in her later book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 44. We will also refer to her view of the self as 'ecstatic' as Hegelian; see note 31.

[17] In a brief remark, Catherine Keller distinguishes between Butler's writings before and after 2000. The latter 'break into an overt discourse of ontological relationalism', while the former focussed on 'the regulatory force of sociality more than its ontological complexity' (*Cloud of the Impossible* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 220). A few pages later, Keller nuances this view: 'there is of course no supersession of an earlier by a later Butler, no pivotal conversion' (223). Yet she argues that the events of 9/11 made Butler reflect on mourning (*Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004)), which 'hosts the emergence of an explicit and widened relationalism'. As regards morality, this draws us, according to Keller, into an 'ever wider, perhaps infinite field of accountability' (227).

[18] This is Butler's main problem with the way Hannah Arendt distinguishes between the public and the private, although she starts from an incentive Butler fully acknowledges – doing justice to interdependence as conditioning action. Compare *Notes Toward*, 44–6, 78; *Antigone's Claim*, 81–2.

the 'dependency on others and on living processes' (44) as a precondition for acting – summarised in the question of 'what sustaining web of relations makes our lives possible?' (24). The second makes sure this attention does not lead to a depoliticisation of dependency as a given sphere outside the normative. The first aspect provides a common ground with our interest in how the givenness of family relations can be accounted for in ethics. It emphasises that acting does not start from nowhere and that life is possible only in relations of interdependence. Ethics should take this relatedness into account. The topic of dependence will receive separate attention in Chapter 4, but in Butler, it is combined with the second, critical emphasis on the acknowledgement of its contingent political shaping. She warns against suggesting that this precondition of interdependence is an unchangeable or even natural factor, without a human, historical character. Because of these dangers, she avoids speaking of family as a distinct sphere of its own. As we will see, this leads to tensions in her thinking, or even an impasse. That is precisely the kind of impasse that may be fruitful for our project, however, because it may point to a different level and mode of reflection, one Butler perhaps does not think possible. This is the kind of reflection opened up by the question of why family cannot be regarded as a specific form of dependence on others that nevertheless reveals ethically relevant general aspects of this fundamental level of relatedness.

Judith Butler: Reading Antigone *beyond the Distinction of Family versus State*

The first key to a better understanding of Butler's motives for not going into family as a separate sphere of life lies in her terminology when analysing *Antigone*. Butler uses the term 'kinship' instead of family. She hardly explains the difference, apart from a brief remark that 'by kinship I do not mean the "family" in any specific form' (*Antigone's Claim*, 5). Apparently, she associates 'family' with 'specific forms' and wants to stay far from such forms. This reading is confirmed by what follows: the book turns out to be an argument in favour of what she finally calls a 'radical kinship' perspective. This aims to 'extend legitimacy to a variety of kinship forms' and 'refuse[s] the reduction of kinship to family' (74). Kinship is eventually called a 'socially alterable set of arrangements that . . . organize the reproduction of material life, . . . ritualization of birth and death, . . . bonds of intimate alliance, and . . . sexuality' (72). It changes constantly. This radical perspective is an alternative to the lack of openness to 'change'

and 'radical alterations' (19) in conceptions of kinship and family in particular that are presupposed in many *Antigone* interpretations.[19]

We already observed that Butler finds this lack of openness precisely in the Hegelian splitting of human life into two spheres of kinship and state. As a result, this closed interpretation does not do justice to the unconventional figure of Antigone either. How precisely do these problems arise in Hegel's *Antigone* reflections? According to Butler, the separation of kinship from the social and the categorisation of Antigone and Creon under these headings takes place in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here Hegel claims that Antigone is 'the eternal irony of the community' and 'represents the law of the household gods' while 'Creon represents the law of the state' (4). There is a clear hierarchy between the spheres: 'kinship must give way to state authority as the final arbiter of justice' (5); Antigone's transgressing of state norms is 'necessarily failed and fatal' (6). This already shows, according to Butler, that the splitting into two spheres of life does not mean a peaceful situation of co-existence, but conflict. The spheres are not in harmony, but they also depend on each other: there is an 'essential relation between the two spheres'. As a result of this conflict in relation, 'every interpretative effort to cast a character as representative of kinship or the state tends to falter and lose coherence and stability' (5). Hegelian interpreters of *Antigone*, however, do not recognise this problem. They oppose Antigone to Creon as belonging to one sphere only. Butler's book is mainly a long, drawn-out criticism of this reductionist view of the main characters Creon and, in particular, Antigone and an attempt to arrive at a much more complex reading. This also implies a much more complex understanding of kinship than is possible in its static opposition to the sphere of the state.

Primary in the alternative reading Butler proposes is the fact that Antigone is herself a daughter of an incestuous relationship and thus far from a representative of 'kinship' in any general sense. The incestuous character of the relations is also present in Antigone's bond with Polynices in which the erotic tone cannot be missed, as Butler states (e.g., 53–5). Moreover, in the ways she acts, Antigone does not limit herself to the

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[19] Eleanor Kaufman also draws attention to Butler's favouring of the concept of 'kinship' and relates it to 'its resonances from Lévi-Strauss and structuralist anthropology' ('Why the Family Is Beautiful (Lacan against Badiou)', *Diacritics* 32/3–4 (2002): 135–51, at 137). The discussion with Lévi-Strauss and structuralism as part of the same school of thought as Lacan, which, moreover, deeply affected feminism, is indeed central to Butler's argument. See in particular *Antigone's Claim*, 14–18, which we will discuss later in this chapter. Butler does not refer to the fact that Hegel does use the terminology of the 'family' in the context of his Antigone remarks. In her analysis of his views, she also uses the term 'kinship'.

sphere of kinship but enters the public realm. In doing so, she also transgresses the boundaries of gender, illustrated by others' characterisations of her in the play as 'manly'. Finally, the language she uses clearly borrows from the political. Butler does not elaborate in a similar way on Creon's transgressing of any narrow identification with the state, but briefly indicates the hereditary character of his kingship and the final disintegration of his sovereign position. These parallels show that Creon and Antigone are 'metaphorically implicated in one another' (6). Thus, in the play, kinship and state presuppose each other and '"acts" that are performed in the name of the one principle take place in the idiom of the other' (11). Any static distinction between the two spheres is thus brought 'into crisis' (12).

While accusing Hegelian thinking sometimes of a too simple and absolute opposition between the two, Butler states elsewhere that Hegel does in fact acknowledge this reciprocal presupposition (12).[20] However, for Butler, Hegel substantiates this dialectics in a far too hierarchical way. Hegel refers to the concrete dependence of the state upon the family as a supplier of male soldiers. The dependence is invasive: the public sphere 'interfere[s] with the happiness of the family ... creating for itself "an internal enemy – womankind in general. Womankind – the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community"'.[21] Here it becomes clear, says Butler, that Hegel in the end sees Antigone only as a figure to be surpassed: she turns into 'womankind', the 'mother' who produces sons who can become citizens by leaving behind the primacy of the sphere of kinship (12, 36–7). Antigone, as a woman, cannot become a citizen herself. For Butler, the 'strange consequences' of this Hegelian view of Antigone are that it is precisely her representation of kinship that makes her a criminal in the public domain and, secondly, that Hegel's *Phenomenology* in fact 'effaces' her name (29, 31, 35, 36).[22] In the end, Antigone is ruined by the instability inherent in any one-sided position, just like Creon is. In line with this

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[20] In a short section (*Antigone's Claim*, 38–40) on how Hegel views *Antigone* in another work, his *Philosophy of Right*, Butler also observes this ambiguity of acknowledging the reciprocal presupposition of state and kinship on the one hand and denying kinship a legitimate, visible place of its own on the other. The problematic result of the latter denial is that Hegel 'not only accepts her [Antigone's] fatal disappearance from the public stage but helps to usher her off that stage and into her living tomb' (*Antigone's Claim*, 39).

[21] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 35 (references to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, §475).

[22] Butler does not explain this remark further at first (*Antigone's Claim*, 29), but she uses 'effacement' later (31) to refer to the fact that Antigone is mentioned explicitly only once in the text of the *Phenomenology* (see note 38), a reference that is subsequently 'effaced' by misinterpreting her political deed in general terms as the acting of 'womankind' (*Antigone's Claim*, 36). This interpretation focusses on the second part (part BB.VI.b) of the section on the 'Ethical World' of the

one-sided view, her relationship with her dead brother is characterised by Hegel as 'without desire'. This is precisely the point at which it is opposed to relationships in the public sphere. This absence of desire is the result of the blood relationship (13). Butler concludes that, for Hegel, it is thus the 'blood' relation that protects the relation against incest, stabilises kinship and establishes a specific non-desiring kind of recognition in the kin relations that is different from that of citizens in the public sphere.[23] Thus, Butler claims, Hegel's '*Phenomenology* becomes the textual instrument of the prohibition against incest' (13). In such an approach, there is of course no real place for the daughter of an incestuous couple; she becomes a figure to be surpassed, whose name is effaced.

Butler refers to incest as something that is unfortunately left unsaid in Hegel and in many other readings of Antigone (17). The topic is central, however, in her dealing with Jacques Lacan's view of Antigone, which she reads as in line with the structuralist theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss on kinship and the prohibition of incest. Although she admits that Lacan 'take[s] radical distance from Hegel, objecting to the opposition between human and divine law' (40), his interpretation eventually suffers from a dualism similar to Hegel's. In Lacan – and in Lévi-Strauss as well (12) – kinship is not separated from the state, as the state does not figure in his interpretation. Kinship also remains outside the social here, now in the form of the sphere of the 'symbolic'. Lacan separates the symbolic from the social by viewing it as a 'structure of communicability and intelligibility' on which the social depends. It is the level of 'those threshold rules that make culture possible and intelligible' (16–17). This basic structure, however, is 'not precisely malleable' (12) and that is, just like in Hegel, where Butler's objections start. Kinship as demarcated by the 'threshold rule' of the incest taboo again pertains precisely to this level of pre-social, invariable structures. This invariable character may seem nuanced by the ambiguity that is not absent in Lacan's interpretation. Kinship both enables the social and is a mutually exclusive pair with it, which reminds one of the imprecise reciprocal presupposition of kinship and state in Hegel. Butler's suspicion is raised again, however, by the quasi-universal character of the symbolic in Lacan. The structure is not just contingent, like culturally variable rules and norms, but precedes them, enables them. As a result, a certain

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Phenomenology. We will return to this section and also discuss the absence of her name later in this chapter.

[23] Butler notes that this idea of 'recognition without desire' goes against Hegel's view in an earlier part of the *Phenomenology* (B.IV, §167), where he argues that recognition is motivated by desire. This is the desire to find oneself reflected in the Other, in whom one is also lost (*Antigone's Claim*, 13–14).

'reification' takes place (21). The symbolic is contingent but, paradoxically, in a necessary way. As the symbolic takes shape precisely in kinship relations, these relations lack an openness to change.

Butler finds Lacanian psychoanalytical views in Lévi-Straussian structuralism and a tendency towards 'theoretical conservatism' (75) in feminist theory based on them.[24] They interpret the incest taboo as a rule that, despite its apparent indeterminateness, does determine the forms kinship should take. There is even the desire to view the taboo as 'the indisputable law'. Butler regards this as a 'theological impulse within the theory of psychoanalysis' (21). Hence her rhetorical question concerning the status of this rule: 'Is that not to resolve by theological means the concrete dilemmas of human sexual arrangements that have no ultimate normative form?' (21, cf. 44–5, 75). This question clearly summarises Butler's problems with the separation of kinship and the state or the social as different spheres, the first somehow preceding and enabling the second. Such a scheme easily supports a law-like interpretation of contingent family norms.

The Impasse as a Result of the Contemporary Danger of Reifying Family

This problem of the 'reification' of contingent family norms is not theoretical or abstract in Butler's reflections. Rather, this is the point at which the topicality of her argument comes to light. The 'reification' is alive and well in the dominant heterosexual perspective. Butler states: 'The horror of incest . . . is not that far afield from the same horror . . . felt toward lesbian and gay sex, and . . . the moral condemnation of voluntary single parenting, or gay . . . or with more than two adults involved' (71).[25] Butler analyses her time as characterised by a tension. New transformations of kinship exist next to what seems to be their precise opposite: nostalgic family idealisation and 'Vatican protests against homosexuality', in brief

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[24] Compare Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13/1 (2002): 14–44, for example, 38–40.

[25] A more elaborate list of what may be called 'new' or 'nontraditional' family forms and situations is given earlier on in her text as characteristic of her time in which

> children, because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile, and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another, move from family to no family, move from no family to a family, or in which they live, psychically, at the crossroads of the family, or in multiply layered family situations, in which they may well have more than one woman who operates as the mother, more than one man who operates as the father, or no mother or no father, with half-brothers who are also friends – this is a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive. It is also a time in which straight and gay families are sometimes blended, or in which gay families emerge in nuclear and non-nuclear forms. (*Antigone's Claim*, 22–3)

a tendency to identify being human with 'participation in the family' (22).[26] This tension between radical alterations in family forms and conservative family views turns out to be the current background to Butler's argument. Against this background, she argues in favour of a view of kinship that is open to change and is not constituted by what she calls the exclusion of the non-human (81–2). This is also the background of her rereading of *Antigone*.[27] Within this framework of family values debates, Antigone becomes for Butler a representative not of family, but of the people who fall outside the scope of the generally approved family forms. She becomes the woman who speaks from the position of the 'less than human' (82). By speaking up in the public domain, Antigone destabilises the given orders of kinship, gender and the human. This cannot be acknowledged in the interpretations in line with Hegel and Lacan, who focus on Antigone's downfall as a result of her being captive to the familial order. Thus, Butler reads *Antigone* as a radical impulse for critically assessing the given rules that determine the legitimacy of forms of love (23).

Butler herself points out that her critique from a 'radical perspective' does not mean 'the end of kinship itself' (72).[28] However, she does not elaborate on what an alternative theory of kinship could look like. One finds only a few concrete examples of kinship beyond the 'Anglo-American standard of family normalcy': 'black urban kinship arrangements' that are based not on the male but on the female family roles and on friends but cannot simply be understood as 'fatherless' (73), 'consensual affiliation' as substituting for the blood tie and HIV/AIDS buddies of the Gay Men's Health Clinic in New York (74). The sparseness of these examples affirms that, for Butler, *Antigone* is not the occasion for a separate constructive reflection on kinship or family. This seems to be due to the questions of the day she regards as urgent. For her, a deconstructive approach is most important given the contemporary dominance of heterosexual norms – for example, in the prevalent objections against 'civil unions' as alternative marriage-like contracts and the legalisation of gay marriage.

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[26] Compare Butler's discussion of French protests, in particular that of Sylviane Agasinksi, against gay parenting and the legitimisation of gay marriage in 1999 and 2000 ('Is Kinship Heterosexual?', 29–31). She interprets these protests as in line with the kinship theories of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. Note the resemblances with the views of Giddens and Bauman discussed in Chapter 1.

[27] Note that this is a much more specific discussion than the one she herself mentions as the reason for her rereading of *Antigone* – that is, the general issue of the feminist escape to state protection (*Antigone's Claim*, 2).

[28] Butler refers for this statement to 'schools of cultural anthropology' that also criticise the Lévi-Straussian structuralist model of kinship but still see a constructive use for the notion of kinship (see also note 29).

As already briefly indicated, however, this refraining from paying any constructive attention to kinship is not in keeping with Butler's interest in interdependence as conditioning the ethical. This impasse in Butler's thinking gives rise to the question of whether it is not important to analyse kinship as an example of this dependence, one that, moreover, is an important basis for human moral acting. In such an analysis, the contingent, alterable character of kinship could be taken into account. A brief description Butler gives in a later article confirms this relationship between the two themes of fundamental dependence and kinship: 'kinship practices will be those that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few)'.[29] Moreover, Butler relates this fundamental dependence explicitly to her views on the conditions of human acting. Throughout her work, she points out two aspects by which human acting is conditioned. First, human beings are always implicated in a 'set of norms' (*Giving an Account*, 8)[30] that precede them and to which they have to relate their acting. These norms should not be misunderstood in a structuralist sense as a 'totality' or as invariable (24) – a remark that recalls her criticism of the structuralist view of the 'law of kinship' in *Antigone's Claim*. Relating to the norms is always a struggle because they have a general, impersonal quality that disorients the view of ethics as a personal affair between one person and the other (25). Second, our acting always takes place in relations which Butler characterises explicitly as 'relations of dependency' (20). She emphasises that the character of these 'formative relations' is opaque – that is, 'these forms of relationality are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization'. This 'follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency'. However,

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[29] Butler, 'Is Kinship Heterosexual?', 15. In this later text, Butler refers approvingly to post-structural kinship views in anthropology that counter the traditional relation between kinship and nature or biology. Here, kinship is conceived, for example, as 'a kind of doing' (34), and as 'assembled from a multiplicity of possible bits and pieces' (36). Butler relates the first view to David Schneider and the second to Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon. We will return to these authors in our discussion of the anthropology debate on the status of kinship in Chapter 3. However, Butler's regard for these views does not lead to a constructive elaboration of them. Rather, she concludes: 'Kinship loses its specificity as an object once it becomes characterized loosely as modes of enduring relationship . . . Kinship ties . . . may well be no more or less than the intensification of community ties, may or may not be based on enduring or exclusive sexual relations, and may well consist of ex-lovers, non-lovers, friends, community members' (37). Thus, she does not seem to descry here any possible elucidative power for reflection on kinship as a 'specific object' either – that is, as a sphere of its own.

[30] The references are to *Giving an Account*, but the theme is also central to the earlier *Precarious Life* and returns in the recent *Notes Toward* as well as in her articles and interviews.

it is 'precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds' (20). Another way in which Butler expresses this emphasis is by analysing human action as taking place in a living world where 'life' should be understood as interdependent in principle (*Notes Toward*, 43). She specifies this interdependence of all life in being related to the other human being as constitutive of one's 'self'. She calls this an 'ecstatic' view of the self which she traces back to Hegel's *Phenomenology*.[31] This is a view of the self as constituted by 'recognition', by being acknowledged by another person and acknowledging the other. This view is based on the idea of self-consciousness as always existing for another, in the other in whom one both loses and finds oneself in a reciprocal process (*Phenomenology*, §182). This approach emphasises that the self cannot be understood otherwise than as relational with all its 'decentering effects'.[32]

Family as a Sphere of Its Own?

Butler herself apparently does not see any possibility for a constructive elaboration of kinship beyond the impasse mentioned. Her focus is on the current dangers of approaching family as a separate sphere that somehow precedes the public one. We have already indicated that this criticism goes to the heart of our project. Our questions actually concern the topic of whether the relationality of family is a specific one and how its meaning for morality may be conceptualised. It is this question that we attempt to answer by the notion of an intuitively experienced, unnameable, yet strong family tie. As a result, we feel called to account by her criticism. In particular, we highlighted that in *Antigone* the family tie is present without being made explicit. This emphasis may in fact lead to a lack of transparency as regards one's assumptions regarding what family might mean. Dominant family patterns may in the end be discovered to have been presupposed in it from the beginning, consciously or unconsciously, thus shaping the views of family in a hidden way. Those forms of family life that somehow do not count as a 'real family' due to prejudice, mistrust or simply ignorance can thus be excluded. This would add to the marginalisation of non-mainstream family forms. Moreover, when family is seen as

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[31] For example, Butler, *Giving an Account*, 27 (referring to *Phenomenology* B.IV.A, §178–84); Judith Butler, 'Longing for Recognition', in *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought: Beyond Antigone?*, ed. by Kimberly Hutchings and Tuija Pulkkinen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 109–29, at 125.

[32] Butler, 'Longing for Recognition', 127.

a preliminary sphere that determines our acting without our being aware of it, this may easily become a licence to regard one's acting as something one is not fully accountable for. These critical questions will therefore accompany our further research and preclude any easy getting beyond the impasse and heading for the mystery.

On the other hand, this danger was not something of which we were unaware. We have emphasised from the outset that our time is one of increasing diversity in family forms and acknowledged the need to account for this in speaking about family. From the start, our approach was directed at evoking family as a phenomenon without restricting it to specific forms. Our approach to family as mystery is motivated also by this concern. Butler confirms the importance of the open character of any notion of family. However, in our view, this does not mean that any investigation of family as a distinct sphere is in principle disqualified. We may still meaningfully ask for the specific character of family relations without excluding, for example, non-blood relations. Our project is an attempt to show that this may be done in a way that is meaningful, in particular for ethics.

Furthermore, Butler's positive attention to what conditions morality may be taken into account constructively in our reflection on the ethical status of family. This implies a correction of views of morality in which individuals freely and autonomously make choices starting from scratch. It thus ties in with the field in which we have from the outset localised the most important challenges for being and thinking family in our time, namely the field of the given that contrasts with the dominant conceptions of agency and relationships. Moreover, we saw that Butler points out the opaque character of these 'formative relations' precisely because they are relations of dependence. The concern for the opaqueness is similar to our intentions in approaching family as mystery. For Butler, the fundamental relations that condition human acting cannot be objectified in a precise, clear way. What is more, these relations are rooted in the subject's 'opacity to itself'. These points of attention may be related to our discoveries concerning the character of the family tie as mystery in *Antigone*. Here we saw that the family tie is presupposed and apparently somehow experienced intuitively as a ground for acting and calling each other to account. However, it is not formulated in an explicit way, in, for example, the form of some concrete law of the family duty of burial. Moreover, the tie is interpreted differently by the different characters. Attempts to remind family members of the implications of the family tie seem to have little result, although the change in Ismene's behaviour may be seen as a response to Antigone's appeal to her as sister in the first scene.

Finally, Butler's reflection can also be used in a positive way insofar as she does raise the topic of the meaning of kinship and chooses Hegel's thinking on Antigone and family as a framework. She does not simply regard it as outdated or superseded. As we noted, this interest in Hegel is visible more broadly, especially among feminist thinkers. It is remarkable insofar as this reception is at the same time very critical. Within this field, Butler stands out as a result of her focus on kinship, which confirms once more that she does think it an important theme on which to reflect. Other authors rather specify their critical reading of Hegel to the dualism between male and female.

Hegel and the Other Side of Freedom

In line with Butler, many contemporary feminist interpretations point out that Hegel misses the exceptional and rebellious character of Antigone that breaks social conventions precisely with respect to feminine roles.[33] By turning Antigone – as the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* surprisingly does – into a 'champion of the rights of the family', she is in fact marginalised. She is confined to the private, so-called natural sphere of family and to that of acting on the basis of feelings and intuitions. This is a sphere one needs to go beyond if one is to become a citizen, a freely reflecting individual, which is a development reserved for men. This way of opposing women and men is often condemned in feminist critique for its 'essentialising', a term which is often left unexplained, or extended with the qualification 'biological'. In comparison to these critics of essentialism regarding being a man or a woman, Butler focusses more on the essentialising of kinship versus state. Butler and the feminist interpretations do agree, however, in extending Antigone's liberation from this essentialism to the liberation of similarly marginalised people of our time: women, LGBTQ, incestuous lovers, people living in 'new' kinship configurations and so forth. For some, this liberation project may also draw inspiration from Hegel. These authors are less rejective in formulating typically feminine characteristics and even assign a central place within them to notions like nature, immediateness or feeling.[34]

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[33] This point of attention is quite visible in a list of ten points of feminist contention against Hegel which Jocelyn Hoy gives in her analysis of Hegel's use of Antigone in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and contemporary feminist receptions of it (Jocelyn B. Hoy, 'Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece', in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit, ed. by Kenneth R. Westphal (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), 172–89, at 177–8).

[34] Antoinette Stafford refers to Luce Irigaray and Shari Neller Starrett as examples of such approaches ('The Feminist Critique of Hegel on Women and the Family', *Animus* 2 (1997): 1–29, at 8–11, 13–15).

Aside from the question of whether Hegel is more or less favoured in these interpretations, what is most remarkable is the fact that Hegel's views on the female and family in relation to Antigone are such dominant points of reference for current reflection on gender. This dominance is often explained in terms of the internal dynamics of Hegel scholarship. Feminist interpretations brought fresh insights into existing Hegel scholarship. As an exponent of an outdated gender ideology, Hegel seems at first to have little to offer to the feminist project as such in his analysis of gender, which is moreover confined to a few passages. However, closer investigations that go against the grain lay bare 'plurivocity' and 'unsettling passages' within Hegel's thinking which enable a more positive use for feminist purposes – for example, by emphasising the dialectical character of his thinking.[35] Still, such approaches cannot do away completely with the problematic sides of Hegel's basic binary scheme of men versus women. Given this problematic character, the amount of interest is remarkable.

There is little meta-reflection on the reasons for the enormous amount of attempts to save Antigone from Hegelian essentialism and marginalisation, be it in connection with or against Hegel. The explanation may in part simply be the attractiveness of reading a famous, beautiful, ancient literary text in dialogue with a classical philosopher.[36] Yet there may be more substantial reasons that relate to the aims of our project. Apparently, the idea of a separation of the two spheres of family and state as feminine and male continues to fascinate interpreters. This may be, as in the case of Butler, because the old Hegelian pitfall is regarded as fully operative in the mechanisms of exclusion in present times. Hegel cannot, then, simply be left behind as outdated. The struggle for the liberation of the marginalised is tough – the battle has not been won. Nonetheless, the fact that Butler herself is also sympathetic to many aspects of Hegel's philosophy already shows that this fascination with Hegel is not just a negative or critical one. It concerns, for example, what she calls the Hegelian idea of an ecstatic self – that is, one principally 'given over' to the Other, which generates an inescapable relationality and vulnerability. This fascination has no

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[35] Hutchings and Pulkkinen (*Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought*, 4–5) distinguish in their introduction to contemporary feminist readings of Hegel between closed, open and deconstructive modes of Hegelian scholarship. For a feminist reading in the closed mode that aims to find in Hegel definitive answers to fundamental philosophical questions concerning sex, gender and sexuality, Hegel is ultimately irrelevant. Open and deconstructive feminist readings offer the possibility of 'using Hegel against himself' and picking out valuable aspects while rejecting other.

[36] In a similar vein, George Steiner calls Hegel's uses of Sophocles 'the life of a major text within a major text' which thus displays 'the whole central issue of hermeneutics, of the nature and conventions of understanding' (George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 29).

legitimate place, however, in her project of saving Antigone from being parasitically perverse, sponging on 'the norm' and thus 'giving way to its rearticulation' (*Antigone's Claim*, 76).

One of the scarce attempts to address meta-questions on the remarkable Hegel reception is found in Antoinette Stafford's analysis of feminist critiques of Hegel's view of women and family.[37] She concludes that, in these studies, the real question is not discussed but only polemically presupposed. This is the fundamental ethical question of how the 'recognition of all individuals as equal, free subjects' can be attained, given the existing differences between people (24). Should these differences be regarded as something to be disposed of, or to be preserved and respected in order to attain freedom and equality? The feminist interpretations of course share the principle of freedom for all and see their work as contributing to its realisation. They disagree, however, on the aspect of difference: should one argue for a specific feminine subjectivity or not? This polarised debate is not just characteristic of the feminist field, but also of contemporary discussions in general that evaluate the principle of freedom (24). It is clear that a 'simplistic deification of radical individual freedom' is to be prevented by taking differences between people seriously. In doing so, however, is it possible to support the crucial importance of the ideal of freedom and equality for modern culture (25)? According to Stafford, the paradoxical consequence of this ideal of freedom and equality is that 'both life within the family and relations and institutions in the public sphere are deeply compromised' (26). Stafford therefore aims for a 'recontextualising' of the principle of freedom and argues that Hegel is highly relevant to this project. If, however, the reception becomes bogged down in either applauding or condemning Hegel's gender views, this relevance remains invisible. Stafford points out that precisely the difficult issue of the interrelation and balance between individual freedom on the one hand and social institutions, given roles and a common good on the other is at the core of Hegel's philosophy. In contemporary interpretations, this core is not accounted for in its full potential because the struggle against essentialism and the suppression of women following from it is seen as much more urgent. As a result, the possible positive value of Hegel's views for the critical debate on an all too radical conception of freedom remains hidden.

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[37] See note 34. Stafford gives an overview of different types of feminist assessment of Hegel, both critical and constructive ones, and also tries to make sense, albeit tentatively, of the oppositions between them within the context of her time.

Stafford's analysis of the feminist interest in Hegel as displaying the deadlocked debate concerning the limits of the ideal of freedom and equality parallels our earlier analysis of an impasse in Butler's thinking. The criticism ventured by Butler and others regarding the danger inherent in any project of understanding the specific character of family is clear. It is the danger of elevating the status quo, the 'normal', to the level of the given. As we also asked in relation to Butler, does this risk disqualify *a priori* any attempt to understand family as a sphere of its own? Or may family also be an important phenomenon to shed light on what may be called the other side of freedom? This 'other side' then concerns what is given, what is not subject to choice, the structures of being human, what Butler calls dependence, relationships, orders in society, accepted patterns of behaviour and so forth. This returning question is the impulse to consider the possibilities of a different kind of understanding family, in the mode of mystery. Now that we have seen that Hegel is such an important dialogue partner in dealing with issues like these, it is obvious that Hegel's texts themselves should be looked at more closely. Why does Hegel point precisely to family as a sphere of its own to be regarded as the starting point or precondition of morality? Do we find constructive aspects in his thinking that may endure the critique of being 'essentialist'? Are there impulses for an approach to family as mystery? Taking Hegel's texts into account may also give us better insight into the reasons for the contemporary ambiguous attraction Hegel exercises, especially regarding *Antigone* and family, and into the validity of Stafford's explanation of it as an underexposed discussion of the limits of freedom. These are important insights for understanding the current controversial status of the topic of the family as well.

The Ethical Complexity of Hegel's View of Family

Coming unsuspectingly to Hegel and his interpretations of *Antigone* from the abundance of contemporary studies leaves one surprised if not puzzled. Hegel's explicit references to the play are few and far between. They appear as part of an argument that is exemplary of the complex and hermetic character of Hegel's reflection. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the text that is central in many contemporary interpretations – Hegel mentions *Antigone* only once in relation to family. This is in the section that also deals with the difference between man and woman and state and family.[38]

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[38] This is in the sixth section on Spirit ((BB).VI.A.b, 'Ethical Action. Human and Divine Knowledge. Guilt and Destiny' 348 /§470). The only other explicit reference in the *Phenomenology* to the play is

Contemporary interpretations usually regard this single reference as self-evidently displaying the context of the entire section. This section should then be read as dealing with the situation of the ancient Greek *polis* and the looming conflict acted out in *Antigone*. This is not, however, stated explicitly by Hegel.[39] The section offers little in the way of a detailed exegesis of the play or an analysis of the notion of the Greek city state. Most interpreters distinguish Hegel's earlier view of family and womanhood in his *Phenomenology* from his view in his later *Philosophy of Right*, where he also refers to *Antigone*.[40] Interpreters regard this section as dealing not with the Greek but with Hegel's own historical setting – that is, modernity. The brief reference to *Antigone* here again does not take the shape of an elaborate discussion of the drama.

This discovery of the brief, non-emphatic, implicit and complicated character of these references increases our earlier surprise at the scale of the attention paid to Hegel's views of Antigone. Why do such brief and opaque remarks lead to such an extensive reception, feminist interpretations in particular, even when they usually disagree with Hegel's dualistic view? We will study Hegel's ethical interest in family as distinct from state with this remarkable character of the current debate in mind. This will also provide us with the focus we need to limit our Hegel analysis, which could easily

at the end of the foregoing section on reason (C/(AA).V.C.c 'Reason as Testing Laws' 322/§437). References to *Phenomenology of Spirit* will first mention the page numbers of the German edition in the Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft edition (Vol. 603), *Phänomenologie des Geistes, Werke* Vol. 3, based on the *Werke* 1832–1845, 5th new ed., ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996). The English translation will subsequently be indicated by paragraph number (*Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Arnold Vincent Miller, with analysis of the text and foreword by John Niemeyer Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977)).

[39] Moreover, it is hard to understand what the textual basis for this interpretation of the section is as referring in its entirety to the situation of the Greek city state. This interpretation is apparently self-evident to contemporary interpreters; they do not take pains to give references for it. For example, Steiner, *Antigones*, 29: 'With Jamesian obliqueness, Hegel will name Antigone twice only. But beginning with section V (c,a) her presence is vivid.' Other examples can be found in Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Wilfried Goossens, 'Ethical Life and Family in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*', in *Hegel on the Ethical Life, Religion, and Philosophy: 1793–1807*, ed. by André Wylleman (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 163–94; Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, 'Hegel's *Antigone*', in *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 59–88; Molly Farneth, 'Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel's Reading of the *Antigone*', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41/4 (2013): 643–67.

[40] We will explore this reference in the *Philosophy of Right* in the next section of this chapter. Other references to *Antigone* in his work are not discussed very much in contemporary debates on Hegel's views. *Hegel-Lexikon* by Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fr. Fromanns, 1957, 89) lists other quotations in *System der Philosophie II (Naturphilosophie der Berliner Enzyklopädie)*, *Ästhetik* Vol. I & II, *Religionsphilosophie*, and *Geschichte der Philosophie* Vol. II. Hegel's high appreciation of *Antigone* is especially vivid in the latter two works.

take up the rest of this volume because of the difficulty of his philosophy and the extensiveness of its reception. Another limitation will be to give an account that stays close to the text in order to make transparent where our observations come from, and evoke the specific character of Hegel's language and way of thinking.[41] Thus we aim to make another in-depth borehole productive – not, this time, of an ancient literary play or a recent interpretation, but of a nineteenth-century systematic reflection. The issue at stake is still whether it makes sense to distinguish family as a separate sphere based on an ineffable tie – an issue sharpened by Butler's critique.

The Ethical Communities of State and Family

Hegel turns to family as part of his scrutiny of consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This work offers a 'science of the experience of consciousness' – that is, knowledge about knowing. It deals with the dialectical process of the development of what Hegel calls 'Spirit', of which it is important to understand all the moments or go through them. The section on family is part of the fourth moment. Whereas the three foregoing ones – Consciousness, Self-consciousness and Reason – exist in Consciousness only, the fourth is Spirit as 'existing world' – that is, as actualised. As such, it completes the foregoing moments. After the moments of 'being-in-itself' and 'for-itself' in Consciousness and Self-consciousness, Reason unites these first two moments. In this third moment of Reason, Spirit is 'aware of a being-in-itself object' as well as of 'having its being-for-itself in that object'.[42] This unity is subsequently discussed as 'immediately actual' in the fourth moment of Spirit. With this level of 'the actual', we enter the domain of ethics, according to Hegel. He calls the real or worldly existence of Spirit the 'ethical world' (*sittliche Welt*). It concerns the world from an ethical perspective because Spirit is here conscious of itself in its relations to others, as part of a community.

Butler's problems with Hegel's view of *Antigone* and family focus on his distinction of two communities, family and the state, and the hierarchy between them. In the section of the *Phenomenology* that includes the passage on family, the dividing movement seems indeed prominent. Right from the start of the section, Hegel emphasises that the actual Spirit 'forces its moments apart' (*schlägt seine Momente auseinander*) (327/§444): it splits

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[41] It is this transparency that we found missing in many contemporary readings of Hegel's *Antigone* interpretations.

[42] Goossens, 'Ethical Life and Family', 164–7.

into two. In action it splits into substance and consciousness of the substance, and these two split in turn into an individual and a universal level. In line with the dialectical principle of his philosophy,[43] however, Hegel also emphasises from the outset of this section the unity of the split moments of subject and object, I and being, individual and universal, consciousness and substance. This unity is found in self-consciousness that is in-and-for-itself. Thus, Hegel actually aims to oppose philosophies like Kant's which do indeed end up with a divided universe of subjects over against objects, of the things as they appear and the things in themselves and so forth.

In the 'ethical world', the moment of splitting is visible in the existence of two types of community. Hegel first mentions the community of the citizens of a nation (*Volk*). This is the Spirit that can be called 'human law'. Hegel defines it only briefly on three levels: that of the '*known* law, and the prevailing custom', of 'government' and 'authority (*Gültigkeit*) which is openly accepted and manifest to all' (329/§448). This is the sphere of Spirit as conscious of itself. It is a community which is public and 'is conscious of what it actually does'. Subsequently, Hegel opposes the human law to the other ethical power, that of the 'divine law'. In the final section of the foregoing chapter on Reason (chapter V), Hegel has already introduced the 'unwritten and infallible laws of the gods' ('*der Götter ungeschriebenes und untrügliches Recht*') with a reference to *Antigone*: 'They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting – Though where they came from, none of us can tell' (322 (referring to *Antigone* v. 456f.)/§437).[44] Hegel explains these verses as referring to the 'eternal' character of those laws which are 'grounded not in the will of a particular individual, but [are] valid in and for itself' (321/§436). These are the laws that simply 'are, and nothing more' ('*Sie* sind, *und weiter nichts*', 322/§437). In section VI on Spirit, Hegel speaks in a similar way about the community ruled by this divine law as 'of immediate substance or substance that simply is' (*unmittelbar oder seiend*) (330/§450). The latter community is called a '*natural* ethical community'

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[43] Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 66: '"Dialectic" in Hegel always means the development and sublation of a contradiction. Yet "sublation" always carries the sense of "conservation" in addition to that of "annulment". The resulting concept or proposition is supposed to contain both sides of the dissolved, sublated contradiction.'

[44] The same verse is quoted in a formulation by Hegel himself in the remark to §144 of his *Philosophy of Right*, which deals with the unconscious character of the moral human being (*sittliche Mensch*). References to *Philosophy of Right* will mention the paragraph numbers only, as these are uniform for the German original (edition by Georg Larsson (based on Gans' commentaries) of Hegel's *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821; Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1911)) and English translation (*Philosophy of Right*, translated by Thomas Malcolm Knox (1952; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)).

and identified as that of family. In opposition to the conscious character of the community of the nation or state, family is called 'unconscious', although this characterisation does not reoccur immediately. The entire section subsequently elaborates on this community of the family. The ethical power of the state, the nation and citizenship, however, are mentioned only in passing, as the opposite of family, but are not treated in a separate section.

The Peculiar Ethical Character of Family

The first themes Hegel discusses in dealing with family as an ethical community are the characterisations by means of which it was introduced: the terms 'natural' and 'immediate'. The reason for further explanation seems to be that these terms are inconsistent at first sight with the very ethical character of family. Hegel states the ethical is not concerned with 'the *natural* relationship of its members' or any '*immediate* connection of separate, actual individuals', but with the universal.[45] As a result of this inconsistency of being both natural or immediate and ethical, 'the peculiar ethical character' of family is a question (330/§451). Apparently, this character is not obvious.[46] Because of the universal character of the ethical, Hegel states in his subsequent explanation, contingent factors, like feeling or love (*Empfindung, Liebe*) do not constitute the ethical basis of the family relation (331/§451). Likewise, it is not as accidental that familial acts are ethical, like 'rendering some assistance or service in a particular case' in order to promote happiness, or the sequential acts of educating, or helping 'in time of need' (331/§451). These definitions of what moral acting in the context of family is *not* are then followed by brief affirmative statements: acting towards family members is directed both towards 'the individual as such' and to 'the individual *qua* universal'.

This very general analysis of the complex ethical character of family is then suddenly specified by a discussion of the action that expresses this ethical character in its true sense. This is the action that 'no longer concerns the living but the dead' (332/§451). It is within this focus of acting towards the dead that interpreters with an interest in the presence of *Antigone* in this section may start to descry familiar elements. This deed – which is not

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[45] Compare Goossens, who speaks of a paradox regarding the divine law: it is a 'principle of singularity' but 'in its pure universality' and thus concerns 'not the particular determinateness of the single individual, but singularity as the element of every existence' ('Ethical Life and Family', 179).

[46] This difficulty may be why Hegel does not elaborate on state and citizenship in the section, but only on family, for the sphere of the human law is conscious and universal.

explained in more detail here – is called universal and individual at the same time, which recalls the core ambiguity or tension of the family sphere. On the one hand, it concerns the deceased as an individual as it 'embraces the entire existence' of the dead family member in his or her particularity. Being dead, however, also means being 'a *universal* being freed from his sensuous, i.e. individual, reality' because one is 'raised out of the unrest of the accidents of life' (332/§451). Death as such, however, is something immediate and natural, 'not the result of an action *consciously done*' (332/§452). The duty of the family member is precisely to turn the unity and universality of being dead into something conscious. This is done by 'taking on [one]self the act of destruction' (*über sich nehmen*) that in fact has happened to the dead family member (332/§452). By thus 'wedding' the family member to 'the bosom of the earth', the individual is raised to the level of the universal (333/§452). This acting of the family members towards the dead is indicated by Hegel as 'the perfect *divine* law' (334/§453). This is positive ethical acting towards the individual. Hegel then labels all other ethical actions as belonging to the human law. Here, the term 'natural' returns as the opposite of this acting. Hegel states that acting according to the human law is negative in the sense that it raises 'the individual above his confinement within the natural community to which he in his [natural] existence belongs'.

The ethics of family thus turns out to be a very peculiar one, with its exemplification of being 'concerned with the dead'. At the core of the analysis of this ethics lies the term 'nature'. Despite its problematic connotations within an ethical framework, Hegel keeps using it. He does not make explicit why exactly and in which sense he wants to use the term 'natural' for family, but limits himself to clearing away any possible misunderstanding of the term. The example of the familial care for the dead adds another level of meaning to this concept of the 'natural' and the ways in which family is and is not 'natural'. Death itself is called natural, and the conscious acting of family members towards the dead 'interrupting the work of Nature' (333/§452). Although Hegel starts by opposing the divine law of the family to that of the human law of the people as citizens, the discussion concerning the natural character is not elaborated in terms of this opposition. It is the problematic connotation of 'nature' within an ethical framework that bothers Hegel. Apparently, an elaboration of the opposing sphere of what is not natural is not regarded as helpful. With respect to our question of why Hegel deals with family in opposition to the people or the nation, a first answer seems to be that he somehow wants to allow for the level of the 'natural', 'immediate' and 'unconscious' in his ethics, difficult though it may be.

The Divine Law of the Family

The distinction between the human and divine law does return when Hegel subsequently discusses the topic of the 'differences and gradations' of both laws. He explains this topic as casting light on the specific internal movement and operation of these laws, as well as on 'their connection and transition into one another' (334/§454). The latter remark already shows that Hegel does not aim to present the two laws simply as opposites, but also with an eye to their very close relationship and a kind of overlap. Again, these gradations are discussed more elaborately for the divine law than for the human law. The human law is said to live in the government, the community and the independent associations that are its parts. The unity of this community is negative in that it gives the parts 'the feeling of their lack of independence, and keep[s] them aware that they have their life only in the whole' (335/§455). This negative character also means that the human community 'possesses the truth and the confirmation of its power in the essence of the Divine Law and in the realm of the nether world' (335/§455).[47] Apart from their close connection, the latter remark also seems to indicate that the realm of the human law is based on that of the divine law, although it is rather opaque how precisely the latter is the 'truth and confirmation' of the former.

Second, as regards the gradations of the divine law, Hegel mentions the family relations of husband and wife, parent and child, and brother and sister, ordered in ascending gradations of 'purity'. The designations 'immediate' and 'natural' return as characterising the relationship between husband and wife (336/§456). Again, this natural character is seen as in opposition to its being ethical. As a result, it is not this relationship as such that Hegel calls 'real spirit', but it is only in the child that the relationship is said to actually exist. The tension between the natural and the ethical is also present in the second relation, that of parent and child. Both relations are characterised by a 'dutiful reverence' (*Pietät*) towards each other – a term which is not explained any further. As regards the relationships between parents and children, Hegel emphasises that the parent–child relation differs from that of the child with the parents. The emotion that affects the first is that the parents have their reality not in themselves but in the child, which becomes more and more independent of them. The child–parent relation, on the other hand, is emotionally affected by the fact that it has its origin in the unity of other human beings who pass away.

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[47] The term 'nether' (*unterirdisch*) is only later opposed to that of the 'earth' (*Erde*) (339/§460), 'the light of day' (341/§463). In the next section (b), when Antigone is mentioned explicitly, it is opposed to that of the 'upper world' (351/§474).

Hegel then contrasts the brother–sister relation with the first two. We could again hear implicit references to *Antigone* in this special interest in the brother–sister relation. Hegel argues that the brother–sister relation is not, unlike the husband–wife connection, characterised by 'desire' (*begehren*). Here again the point is the non-natural character of the relationship.[48] Hegel states that the brother and sister are of the same blood but qualifies this seeming confirmation of its naturalness with the remark that it 'has reached in them a state of rest and equilibrium'. This is rest in the sense of not being disturbed by the 'desire' and emotions found in the first two relations (336/§457). This relationship is therefore called 'unmixed' and 'pure'. Brother and sister are 'free individualities in regard to each other'. This desire-free character of the brother–sister relation was one of Butler's central points of contention with Hegel (*Antigone's Claim*, 17). Indeed, Hegel does not consider an incestuous brother–sister relation. This may be explained as the result of a lack of awareness of the double character of the incest prohibition as promoting a certain behaviour while at the same time 'producing and maintaining the specter of its transgression' (Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 17). This contention seems to be largely inspired by Lacan and seems to overlook Hegel's own agenda – that is, the analysis of the brother–sister relation as less 'natural' than that between husband and wife. This is a remarkable view of blood relations and one that might have interested Butler as well, given her problems with assigning the status of 'natural' to the family.

Subsequently, Hegel focusses on what the brother–sister relation means for the sister, which may again be read as a confirmation of Antigone's hidden presence. Here one finds the infamous passages in which Hegel speaks about the feminine in general. His language for this characterisation is again that of the tension between individual and universal, and natural and ethical. Hegel here confirms sisterhood as the highest ethical form but also links it to the divine law as the sphere not of the 'daylight' and of 'existence in the real world' (336/§457). The ethical awareness of the divine law is not conscious but 'intuitive' (*Ahnung*).[49] On the other hand, Hegel emphasises the universal, and not the contingent 'feeling' as the basis of the woman's relationships: 'her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire'. Here Hegel starts to distinguish it from the ethical life of the man, albeit briefly. For a man, the two sides – that is,

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[48] A synonym for this desire, the German *Lust*, is again characterised a few lines later as 'natural' (337/§457).

[49] Not being conscious is used at the beginning of the section as a synonym of the 'natural' and 'immediate' character of family.

those of the universal and the individual – being a citizen and conscious as well as those of desire and freedom, are separated (337/ §457). 'He passes from the divine law, within whose sphere he lived, over to human law' (338/ §459). The woman lacks this state of consciousness. She is the 'head of the household and the guardian of the divine law'.

These are of course the kind of passages on man and woman to which many feminist approaches take offence because of their generalising or essentialising character. The point of the section, however, turns out to be not simply the opposition between the two sexes. Hegel goes on to emphasise the relationship between the sexes. As regards brother and sister, the sister receives in her brother a recognition which is pure – that is, not natural or contingent, like in the case of husband and wife (336/§456). Hegel confirms this by stating that 'the loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest' (338/§457). The position of the brother is subsequently described as moving from the sphere of family into that of true, self-conscious ethical life. This difference and the interlocking of the two ethical positions is then explained once more in terms of the 'natural' and 'immediate'. On the one hand, the sexes 'overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance'. On the other hand, they are individual and therefore appear in a naturally different consciousness, as the 'antithesis of the sexes'. But as soon as Hegel has stated this difference, he goes on to emphasise the unity of the two sexes and the interdependence of the two spheres, powers and laws. Both spheres need to be there. 'Neither of the two is by itself absolutely valid' (339/§460).[50] The human law proceeds from and returns to the divine law; the divine law becomes real and active in the human law. Hegel concludes the section by emphasising this 'union of man and woman' as constituting 'the active middle term of the whole' and the unity of the human and divine law (341/§463).

A close reading of this part of the *Phenomenology* brings out its complexity first of all. The project of showing the reasonability of the development of Spirit in the dialectical process of splitting and becoming or being one is difficult. As regards ethics, this way of thinking means that the sphere of moral acting cannot simply be opposed to that of nature. Hegel attempts to show how they presuppose each other or go together. Moral acting in the world is not just a matter of consciously weighing the situation but also of immediateness and intuition. Hegel could have elaborated this in the abstract, but he is convinced that this dialectical structure is also real.

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[50] Compare Hoy, 'Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique', 179, 187.

Then he could have tried to show how the two sides are present in specific ethical actions. However, he chooses a different route – that is, substantiating the dialectics in two different kinds of human community. The problem with this elaboration is of course that it creates the impression of the one being the 'natural' while the other is the truly 'ethical' community. This is not what Hegel actually says, as we have seen. He distinguishes the two communities as both ethical and, in a sense, natural. Moreover, as soon as he has distinguished them, he goes on to point out their unity and interdependence. He spends the greatest part of his argument on the community of the family. This is the most difficult side of the dialectic as it is the ethical sphere that appears to be least ethical. Family is characterised as the implicit, internal and unconscious, and, in that sense, 'natural' sphere. Again, this does not mean that Hegel finally opposes family as the sphere of nature to that of the nation as the conscious, ethical community. Rather, he attempts to show the complicatedness of nature and morality by creating a very dynamic view of reality and of what is at stake in ethics. It is hard to summarise some definite outcome of this complex exercise of thinking together what seems to logically rule each other out. Perhaps this is precisely what the outcome is: Hegel shows the difficulty of the ethical sphere as not just one of freedom and individual decision-making according to universal rules, but something much more complex.

Hegel's Brief References to Antigone

This discovery of the complexity as central outcome of this section contrasts with the contemporary readings. They reproach Hegel for providing a static view that essentialises by appointing specific ethical characteristics to phenomena as if they were given in nature, in particular to the sexes. The problematic character of this undertaking appears clearly in the way Hegel deals with Antigone. The outcome of his interpretation is a marginalised Antigone, locked up within the feminine and the family and made dependent upon the male sphere of conscious, public life. This is not what we found in Hegel's text so far. We saw how the movement of splitting is permanently accompanied by that of becoming and being one, also as regards man and woman. With respect to *Antigone*, we have so far only found remarks that might be regarded as hints. The conclusion of the section on the sister that 'the loss of the brother is irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest', read against the background of the acting of family members towards the deceased as the 'perfect divine law', seems to hint at Antigone's burial act.

The only explicit *Antigone* quotation – apart from the one on divine law cited earlier in this chapter – is found in the section called 'Ethical Action. Human and Divine Knowledge. Guilt and Destiny' (VI.A.b). Hegel contrasts this section with the foregoing one. So far, he explains, he has only dealt with the situation in which 'no deed has been committed' (342/§464). This is the abstract reality of the situation of the 'order and harmony of its two essences, each of which authenticates and completes the other'. This section did not yet account for the dynamics of action itself. Ethical action disturbs the 'peaceful organization and movement of the ethical world' and creates a 'transition of opposites'. Again, Hegel refers to the difficult going together of the ethical and the natural or immediate to explain this. He characterises the acting as self-consciousness, which is the 'pure direction of activity towards the essentiality of ethical life – that is, duty' and therefore 'immediate' or, because of its 'implicit' character, something 'natural' (342–3/§465). There is no conflict here between the two laws because 'ethical consciousness . . . knows what it has to do, and has already decided whether to belong to the divine or the human law'. A conflict arises, however, because this 'immediate firmness of decision' directed at only one law goes together with, or becomes real, in a self. This real self is confronted in the world with the other law, to which it does not adhere, and which it regards as 'without rights of its own' (343/§466).

Hegel thus points out that ethical action is not so much arriving at a decision out of a situation of 'indecision' (342/§465) as acting according to duty, the immediacy of 'knowing what one has to do'. This is always one-sided and conflictual in reality. Hegel characterises acting subsequently as guilt, which may be surprising as its conflictual nature seems inevitable and not something for which one is responsible. To follow the one law is to forsake, even violate, the other and therefore a crime (*Verbrechen*) (345–6/§468). 'Innocence, therefore, is merely non-action, like the mere being of a stone, not even that of a child.' While this guilt is thus presented as inevitable, Hegel goes on to specify a 'more inexcusable' guilt. This is the act of committing the crime knowingly – that is, knowing '*beforehand* the law and the power which it opposes' (348/§470). It is here we find the explicit reference to Antigone. She is mentioned as example of this inexcusable guilt of committing the act knowingly. Hegel even quotes a passage from Sophocles: 'Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred.'[51] Again, it is hard to tell what precisely Hegel means by this

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[51] This is a quotation from the peculiar final speech of Antigone (see note 12), which we referred to at the end of our analysis of the play. It is taken from her remarks on whether her act of burying her

specification, but he goes on to argue that this acknowledgement is in fact the moment of the end of the 'conflict between ethical purpose and actuality'. This is also the end of the self, of ethical individuality, however, that exists only in the universal and is thus destroyed by its opposite. This destruction, Hegel states, is the same for both levels of the divine and the human law. There are no further remarks on Antigone specifically. Rather, she is mentioned as an example of how acting always works, whether it is based on the human or the divine law. The aspect of the 'acknowledging' is again not specific to her but is just another necessary moment in the dialectics of ethical acting, that of unity and therefore also of the destruction of the individual.

The distinction between what is natural versus ethical remains central to the dialectic. These terms are again taken up when the final implicit reference to *Antigone* is found – that is, to her brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, although without mentioning their names. They are mentioned as the expression of the conflict between, on the formal side, the ethical order and unconscious, contingent nature or, on the side of content, that between the divine law and the human law (350/§473). Nature allots being male the contingency of living as two brothers, but this is not possible in the ethical realm, where only one can rule. Their equal right in the end destroys the brothers. The community can honour only one of the deceased, however; the government deprives the other of the final honour. By doing so, the conflict arises in a substantial way, as that between the human and the divine law. At first, as the law of darkness, and the underworld, the divine law succumbs to the more powerful one of the daylight and the earth (351/§474). In doing so, however, the public world has lost its internality and thus 'consumed its own essence'. As a result, the 'victory' of the human law turns out to be its 'downfall'.

Here (351/§474), Hegel suddenly changes the terminology that frames the conflict and returns to the terms of the family versus the community of the state, which had not been mentioned since the end of the foregoing section that dealt with their intricate relation and unity (338–40/§458–61).

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brother is approved by the gods, which contrasts with her earlier claims of the divine character of the law she follows. Lloyd-Jones translates this verse 926 together with the foregoing one as: '(925) Well, if this is approved among the gods, (326) I should forgive them for what I have suffered, since I have done wrong.' Subsequently, Antigone continues by considering the other option: '(927) but if they are the wrongdoers, may they not suffer (928) worse evils than those they are unjustly inflicting upon me'. Since the passage concerns the indeterminate character of how Antigone's acting should be judged, it is surprising that Hegel refers to it to underline that crimes can be knowingly committed. On the aptness of Hegel's reference to this passage, see also Butler (*Antigone's Claim*, 34), who points out the differences in translations of this passage.

He asserts that the dishonouring of the 'sacred claims of the family' by the community is avenged by the dead 'whose right is denied'. The powers evoked by the dead destroy the community of the human law (351/§474). This destruction is then once more positioned within the dialectics between divine and human law. Subsequently, this opposition is called, for the first time in this section, that of the spheres of manhood and womankind (352–3/§475). Again, they are depicted in their intricate interdependence. They suppress each other, make each other into enemies and pervert each other, but they also presuppose each other. Their destructive effects on one another cannot therefore remain without consequences: in the end, they both succumb (*zugrunde gehen*, 354/§475). 'The ethical shape of Spirit has vanished and another takes its place.'[52]

This final passage (352–3/§475) is the one on which Butler's critique and that of many feminist authors mostly focusses: the sudden modulation from the tonality of the *Antigone* story to that of 'womankind'. It contains the famous passage portraying womankind as 'the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community' (352/§475). It is here that Butler sees the effacement of Antigone being completed by Hegel's performing the 'very generalization that Antigone resists' (*Antigone's Claim*, 36). This criticism does not account, however, for what we discovered as crucial to Hegel's aim: to show how the two laws *both* incorporate individual and universal moments, and presuppose each other as the different type of community that also destroys it. Indeed, the *Antigone* story is no longer clearly present in this section, as Butler observes. The language is much more general, but it is hard to read this passage as isolating the two spheres of man- and womanhood and placing the first above the second. It shows, rather, their entanglement. The remarks on the suppression and succumbing of the sphere of family 'presided over by womankind' are paralleled by similar ones concerning manhood as expressed in the nation, community and government. The irony lies in that womankind in fact continues to remind the sphere of manhood of its dependence on the sphere of the family, a dependence that, in its ultimate form, becomes clear in the downfall of the public community. Butler does not account for Hegel's attention to the interrelatedness of the two spheres. Nor does she refer to the last remarks of this section, where Hegel returns once more to the immediate and natural character of the acting. This conclusion confirms the central place of the tension between nature and morality in the argument as a whole. It is here

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[52] This new shape of Spirit seems to be that of the next section (VI.c) on the 'legal status', which deals with the universal unity of isolated, legally equal individuals.

expressed in the most affirmative way as: 'nature as such enters into the ethical act'. It is this coming together of nature and ethical acting, then, that reveals 'the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in the beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium of the ethical Spirit itself' (351/§476).

The Complexity of Family Related to Its Nature as Mystery

We turned to Hegel to analyse his view of family and his interpretation of *Antigone* because of the lively but ambivalent interest in it in contemporary studies. The great fascination with Hegel and the affirmation of his understanding of the individual as fundamentally embedded in relations do not harmonise with the mostly critical tenor of the Hegel reception. The interpretations are dominated by their opposition to the dualistic character of Hegel's thinking about family and state, women and men, and his reading of *Antigone* in that light. Hegel is criticised for not doing justice to the diffuse and variable nature of gender or family and for his marginalising view of Antigone. What came to light in our reading of Hegel, however, was not this clear-cut arrangement of binary oppositions, but the continuous ambiguity of the movements of distinction and unity. Hegel's *Phenomenology* introduces a world view of its own and a different way of posing the problems and trying to solve them than is found in contemporary discussions. It is the world of the unfolding Spirit that splits and becomes one, a unity of opposites. Hegel analyses the tensions and contradictions necessarily related to this dynamic process with respect to their reasonability, and this analysis finds its expression in the systematics of his dialectical method. In this analysis, family comes into view when this systematics is put to the ultimate test – that is, when the question is raised how this dialectic takes place in the reality of moral acting. Family is the context in which one lives this moral complexity. Here it comes to light that moral acting is not just a matter of following the correct universal moral rules, but something much more immediate and intuitive. 'Nature' is Hegel's term for indicating this other side of our acting which points to the given side of life. When reading Hegel's *Phenomenology*, we saw him wrestling primarily with the problem of how to express this ambiguous character of acting. We often concluded that he evokes this complexity more than he clarifies it.

   These conclusions need not be interpreted in a negative way, however. Again, it may be the moment of an impasse in understanding that points to the complexity of the issue at stake and the need for a different kind of

reflection, one that is open to family as mystery. In our own reading of Hegel, we could not recognise the feminist view that he would evoke family as a clear, distinct sphere of life with a specific shape, well-defined roles and positions for its members, and correspondingly articulated rules on how they should act. At first sight, Hegel might give the latter impression because of his emphasis on the strong presence of the natural and the immediate in the sphere of family. In that sense, the private sphere of family differs from the public community. Relationships and roles are found to be given, already there, and are not established on the basis of free choice or in relation to having specific skills, as we already indicated in Chapter 1. The crucial place Hegel assigns in familial acting to the care for the dead – with overtones of *Antigone* – revealed that family is not simply natural, but also actively and consciously gives shape to nature. Hegel brings to light this complex coming together in morality of active choice and what at first sight seems entirely incongruous with it – nature, contingency and immediate sensations – in dealing with the special kind of community of the family. This complexity can be seen as a way to elaborate family as mystery. It reminds us, moreover, of the way in which this mystery character was evoked in our reading of *Antigone*. Here, the family tie turned out to be a question and not a phenomenon with a well-defined meaning and status. The tie is unnamed but implies an appeal to which each family member has to respond. They do so in entirely different ways. In a similar way, on the one hand, family in Hegel is a community that 'simply is', where eternal laws not shaped by human beings hold sway. In line with this, one could think of the family tie as unconscious, as not consciously established. On the other hand, however, care for the dead shows that the tie is also consciously shaped, that acting on the basis of such a tie is precisely an 'interruption' of nature. This view of family as a complex combination of the given and its interruption provides a specification of the character of family as mystery.

This reading of the passage on family in Hegel's *Phenomenology* thus gives rise to a different kind of reflection than those found in the contemporary Hegel interpretations mentioned earlier. It resonates with Stafford's analysis of the critical interpretations. Like Stafford, we noticed how much the notion of the 'other side' of the ethical and universal, that of nature, is at the forefront of Hegel's argument. Stafford argues that contemporary interpretations are not sufficiently aware of this specificity of Hegel's questions since they focus entirely on the problems of dualism, essentialising and marginalisation. On the other hand, they are clearly fascinated by Hegel's dealing with this other side of freedom. A reflection that is

attentive to family as mystery creates room for a constructive way to take this 'other side' into account. In the following, we will explore whether this reflection can be further elaborated and specified.

An impetus for this exploration comes from the recent work of the Hegel scholar David Ciavatta. In analysing Hegel's view of Antigone, Ciavatta calls her a hero. Unlike the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism*'s depiction of her, however, she is not a champion of something like family as such for Ciavatta. Rather, in a more delicate way, she is a champion of the 'unreflective dimension of ethical practice'.[53] Antigone shows 'the irreducibility and ethical necessity of this realm of incommunicable significance' (114). As the qualifications 'unreflective' and 'incommunicable' already indicate, Ciavatta's interpretation of Hegel's view of family highlights the ineffable character of the family sphere and its importance for morality that seems relevant to our interest in mystery. Moreover, he greatly appreciates this aspect of Hegel's thinking, which is remarkable given the dominance of critical views in recent receptions of Hegel's views of family and *Antigone*. To explore further the constructive contribution Hegel can make to our analysis of what the distinct moral character of the family tie might be, Ciavatta's interpretation thus seems highly relevant. In addition, taking Ciavatta's views into consideration enables us to also look briefly at the other passage in Hegel on *Antigone* that has attracted attention in the current debate – the one in his *Philosophy of Right*.

Hegel and the Unreflective Morality of Family

It is remarkable that, given the ubiquity of the fierce and fundamental criticism of Hegel, Ciavatta defends Hegel's view of family as a distinct sphere characterised by an unreflective kind of morality.[54] Moreover, he does not even enter into an elaborate discussion with the critics discussed earlier in this chapter. The danger of arriving at a conservative, conformist preservation of the status quo, including its discriminating and marginalising tenor, is not real for him. It is not that he is unaware of the deeply

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[53] David V. Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51.

[54] This defence is found in Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*. For summaries of this focus, see, for example, 6–10, 49–51. Our analysis of Ciavatta's interpretation of Hegel focusses, besides this book, particularly on his 2006 article with the same theme ('The Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy: Hegel on Familial Ties and the Modern Person', *Philosophical Forum* 37/2 (2006): 153–81. Other relevant articles are 'On Burying the Dead: Funerary Rites and the Dialectic of Freedom and Nature in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47/3 (2007): 279–96; and 'The Family and the Bonds of Recognition', *Emotion, Space and Society* 13 (2014): 71–9.

problematic character of lining up the family, woman and nature. Ciavatta argues that such a lining up goes against Hegel's own view. Relating the complete immersion in the familial sphere to specific family members – that is, to women on the basis of certain natural characteristics – is inconsistent with Hegel's view of the process of Spirit as always transforming nature.[55] That the project as such of understanding the 'specific character of the family' as a distinct social sphere or structure of human life is deeply problematic is, however, not a view with which Ciavatta takes issue. On the contrary, his research on Hegel is an endorsement of this Hegelian project, the topicality of which he underpins by drawing parallels to twentieth-century phenomenology and psychological theories.

Intersubjectivity and Recognition in an Unreflective, Immediate Manner

According to Ciavatta, Hegel deals with family in order to express how central intersubjectivity is to one's relating to the world and thus to being a self. Understanding this relation of the self to the world is the translation of what in Hegelian terms is called the actuality of the Spirit. Intersubjectivity should be read here more specifically as mutual recognition.[56] Only as beings immersed in practices of intersubjective recognition is it possible to experience the world and to relate these experiences to oneself as a subject. The special position of the community of family within this general intersubjectivity is what Ciavatta wants to understand. This interest implies that the different kinds of communities, in particular the private domain of family and the public ones of civil

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[55] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 68–72. Compare also 88 and 217n58, where he refers to Mills' *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* and Butler's *Antigone's Claim* as examples of interpretations that incorrectly 'assert that Hegel himself straightforwardly regards familial roles . . . as naturally fixed, static, and ahistorical'. According to Ciavatta, Hegel shows that people 'experience their own familial self-identification as fixed in this way', but aims to point out an 'inherent tension in this self-identification' that makes one aware of 'other ways of making sense of identity'. This note reveals that Ciavatta is aware of Butler's problems regarding family as a distinct sphere and refers to her own view as opposed to Hegel in 'that kinship structures are ultimately plagued by contingency and indeterminateness'.

[56] Ciavatta takes into account Hegel's ethical views on family and recognition in both *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*. We will refer to general views based on both works first, and later to Ciavatta's views on aspects specific to one of them. Although Ciavatta emphasises that Hegel's focus in the *Phenomenology* is on the family of the ancient Greek world while the later *Philosophy of Right* deals with the modern, 'bourgeois' family, he argues that intersubjective recognition is characteristic of both (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 60, 91–3; 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 156). In his article 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', he focusses entirely on the *Philosophy of Right* apart from the analysis of the brother–sister relation in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (169–70) and a few other remarks.

society and state, should be clearly distinguished from each other.[57] Family offers unique practices of recognition that do not occur in civil society. Furthermore, these two domains contrast with each other: they both offer something different that cannot be translated into the discourse of the other. However, they are also related in the sense that they presuppose each other, albeit within a specific hierarchy. Family is the primary community on which the civil sphere subsequently builds. Ciavatta aims to understand in what sense family can be analysed as having its 'own internal logic'.[58]

Ciavatta analyses Hegel's interest in this logic of the family as having a critical purpose. Hegel regards the modern civil sphere, more precisely the state, as the sphere in which the subject arrives at real freedom. The ideal of freedom concerns in particular the independence of individuals who can make up their minds consciously and transparently and thus act on the basis of a rational consideration of laws or principles.[59] Hegel's quest for the logic of the family breaks open this view of being human and acting morally. It lays bare the ethical significance of the level of immediate, unreflective experiences and feelings which are always shaped by human relationships. For Ciavatta, the relevance of this critical project lies in that it provides an alternative for the 'privileging of the I's interiority'. This privileging is visible both in twentieth-century phenomenology and in Kant's critical philosophy due to their focus on experience as an 'autonomous source of meaning'.[60] Hegel, on the other hand, takes into account the importance of mutual recognition for relating to oneself and the world. This focus on the critical potential of Hegel's interest in intersubjectivity and recognition recalls our analysis of the positive part of Butler's elaboration of Hegel's views.[61] Butler, however, would definitely disagree with any affirmation of the importance of distinguishing between family and the public spheres in order to

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[57] The third part of the *Philosophy of Right* on 'Ethical Life' is clearly divided in three sections: family, civil society (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and state (*der Staat*). The *Phenomenology* does not order its section on the 'Ethical World' (VI.A.a) in this threefold way, but uses the principal distinction between the divine and the human law. It groups the latter two public communities together in the 'nation' (*Volk*), although it also speaks sometimes of the 'citizens of the nation' (*Bürger des Volkes*) (329/§447). We will go into the differences between the two works in the main text.

[58] With this aim, Ciavatta distinguishes himself from other contemporary interpretations of family in Hegel. They explain the logic of family as much more subservient to the modern view of the individual person ('Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 155n6; see also 156, 164 and *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, e.g. 58). We will return to this debate in the main text.

[59] For example, Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 153–4 and passim; *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 89–90, 128–9.

[60] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 19.

[61] For example, one may think of Butler's attention to the 'irrecoverable' character of the primary level of dependency relationships that form us and guide our acting (Butler, *Giving an Account*, 20).

understand their unique contribution. What is it that makes Ciavatta all but suspicious of this dualistic approach?

To understand his affirmative use of Hegel, Ciavatta's analysis of Hegel's view of Antigone is a good starting place. On this point as well, Ciavatta does not engage in the critical project of reading the Sophoclean *Antigone* against the grain of Hegel's own interpretation, as we have seen with Butler and others. He refers to the play as an apt expression of the core of Hegel's view of the importance of family for morality. As cited earlier, Ciavatta calls Antigone the hero of the unreflective ethical demands and as such, exemplary of the moral necessity of the realm of the family. The unreflective character for him is visible first of all in that Antigone feels the obligation to bury her brother in spite of the interdiction but 'does not claim to *understand*' it in a 'rational, reflective manner'.[62] This unreflective character of her acting is further specified as 'without hesitation', 'as though she could not imagine herself not doing it'. Ciavatta explains this self-evident character as corresponding to the 'unquestionable, unwritten, living' character of the law she follows, a 'demand written into the very nature of things'. Moreover, he interprets it as an act on which 'her very identity as sister hinges'.

For this first portrait, Ciavatta refers primarily to the *Phenomenology* and focusses on the tension between the private and the public spheres or the law of singularity and that of universality. Family differs from the public community. In the family, one finds mutual recognition as singular individuals that defines one's self-identity (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 58).[63] This recognition is made or broken by the existence of these particular family members. They are non-substitutable – a characteristic which recalls our exploration of the given character of family in Chapter 1.[64] This mutual recognition in family relations by means of which people become a particular self is contrasted with that of the public sphere. The 'general recognition of a wider community' regards

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[62] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 51–2. In his 2007 article, Ciavatta points out the unconscious character of the compulsion to bury in the section of the *Phenomenology* (330–3/§451–2) discussed previously: 'its origin and explanatory rationale is ultimately and essentially concealed from those who are compelled by it' ('Burying the Dead', 295). In this sense, those who perform this ritual are 'opaque to themselves' (296). Nevertheless, these actions are 'a necessary stage in freedom's self-development'.

[63] Ciavatta refers to a passage in the *Phenomenology* (336/§456) as expressing this 'law of singularity' without making explicit which sentences he means. Hegel characterises here the husband–wife relationship as 'in the first place the one in which one consciousness immediately recognizes itself in another, and in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition', albeit this is only recognition on the natural, not on the ethical level.

[64] See pp. 24–5. Again, this term 'non-substitutable' is not a direct reference to a formulation in Hegel.

individuals as 'ultimately contingent, substitutable representatives among others' (58). Moreover, there is a second contrasting sphere and potential source of conflict, that of the natural world characterised by 'contingency and externality'. Ciavatta formulates the contrast as follows: 'whereas in the natural world a being's singularity is precisely what *separates* it from all others – making its body spatially external to all other bodies, for instance – in the family this singularity is precisely what joins selves to one another'. Thus, family is 'engaged in a process of *spiritualizing nature* – that is, of making an otherwise indifferent, external world of nature into a site for the realization of intersubjective recognition'.

The latter relation, in particular of morality to what is natural, is the background against which Ciavatta interprets Hegel's use of the figure of Antigone. He regards Hegel's speaking in the *Phenomenology* of the ethical purity of the sister–brother relationship, which we also have analysed, as indeed referring to *Antigone*. Antigone is visible in Hegel's characterisation of what acting as a sister means: denouncing 'bare, natural life', like 'natural impulses for food, comfort, or general self-preservation' (76). In refuting her self-preservation, Antigone 'stands as a hero'. Thus, she is contrasted with her sister Ismene, who 'seems more compelled by her natural fear of death than by her duty of recognizing her brother qua brother'. Yet, Ciavatta argues, Antigone's way of acting should not be understood as conscious, resulting from deeply reflective deliberation and in that sense denouncing 'natural life'. Rather, Hegel presents it as though it were *natural* (88).[65] 'Family identities are taken up . . . precisely *as* fixed and given' – that is, as quasi-natural. Acting as a sister is not a choice, but an 'immediate feeling . . . that follows naturally from her own character.'[66] Being a sister is not an individual, particular identity that Antigone shapes all by herself. Ciavatta interprets Hegel's view of the act of burying as a ritual 'made in advance, behind her back', one that is '*natural* to the self, issuing from it *as though automatically*' (89). For this interpretation, Ciavatta refers again to Hegel's quotation from Sophocles concerning the everlasting but unknown character of the family laws (89n61 (*Phenomenology* §437 end section V)). This quasi-natural acting makes

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[65] Ciavatta refers to the section in the *Phenomenology* which deals with the 'immediate', 'implicit' and 'natural' character of 'ethical consciousness' (342–3/§465), which we have also analysed.

[66] Ciavatta argues elsewhere that, as Antigone's acting is analysed as based 'solely on her feeling of what is demanded of her as a sister', 'feeling' is not always contingent, but may 'ground and express the deepest layers of my self-identity as a whole' ('Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 173n65). This attention to the importance of feeling and affection for moral acting relates to the general argument of Ciavatta's book as well, particularly the third part ('The Affective Basis of Familial Ethicality') – for example, 116–19, 121–30.

Antigone all but a 'conscientious objector' (88) who opposes her view to
that of others. The imperative to bury her brother is 'immediately and self-
evidently operative in the objective world' (89).

It is clear that this interpretation of Antigone is far from that of Butler and
others or even precisely the kind of interpretation against which they argue.
It reduces Antigone to a sister and thus interprets her exceptional, rebellious
acting as an outlaw in the public sphere as a necessity based on her family
position.[67] Ciavatta, however, defends this view vigorously and seems obliv-
ious to any danger such as locking people up in the status quo, denying them
a dissenting view of their own, and making women especially passive
instruments of tradition and custom.[68] Furthermore, he argues that Hegel
brings to the fore the specific logic of the family as a criticism of any narrow-
minded focus on the modern ideal of freedom. For this interpretation, he
refers more elaborately to the later *Philosophy of Right* than to the earlier
Phenomenology. Here, Hegel makes a much more clear-cut distinction
between the private and the public sphere than in the *Phenomenology*.

In the section of the *Philosophy of Right* on 'Ethical Life', Hegel distin-
guishes three communities: the family, civil society (*die bürgerliche
Gesellschaft*) and the state (*der Staat*). Civil society is the context in which
individual freedom may be fully realised. This freedom means being inde-
pendent, consciously choosing one's direction (*Philosophy of Right*, §153–4).
The relationships that conform to this context are those of contract – that is,
those to which individuals freely consent (§155). The logic of the family is
contrasted with this sphere of self-reflecting, free individuals: in the family,
people are not independent persons, but 'members' (§158). In the family,
I am not 'in selfish isolation but win my self-consciousness only as the
renunciation of my independence and through knowing myself as the unity
of myself with another and of the other with me' (§158A).[69] Hegel even calls
family 'one person and its members . . . its accidents' in the sense that an

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[67] For a summary of this criticism, see Hoy, who refers, apart from her own view, to Butler's *Antigone's
Claim* and Mills' *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* ('Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist
Critique', 183). Ciavatta analyses Butler's interpretation as centred around the moment in
Sophocles' play in which Antigone consciously claims the burial as hers, while he argues that, for
Hegel, this moment displays the 'actual confrontation between the family and political commu-
nity', which is the result of the fact that family also aspires to the 'universal recognizability, or to
conscious expression, of its actions – a form of recognition which is proper to political community'
(218n64).

[68] Ciavatta provokes such criticism in particular when he characterises Antigone's acting as 'marrow-
less', 'restorative or conservative . . . rather than productive', 'like the repetitive acts of housework' or
'conserving the only way of life she knows' (88, 89).

[69] The capital 'A' refers to the 'Addition', clarifications by students present at Hegel's lectures. They
were added by the first editor of the lectures, Eduard Gans.

'identification of personalities' takes place (§163). It is this unity that he calls the 'ethical mind' (*der sittliche Geist*).

The way in which this unity is subsequently elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right* seems to differ from the *Phenomenology*. It is found first of all in marriage, while in the *Phenomenology*, the brother–sister relation is the most purely ethical family relation.[70] The love of husband and wife is a less-pure form of ethic characterised by desire, which is overcome in the sister–brother relationship (335–7/§456–7). As we will see, Ciavatta does not regard this as a fundamental difference, however. It is rather a result of the opposition to the public sphere that is more emphatically present in the *Philosophy of Right*. In line with its public character, marriage may be interpreted as a contract between freely consenting individuals. Hegel, however, emphasises that marriage is, just like the family, becoming 'one person' (*Philosophy of Right*, §162). This means renouncing one's 'natural and individual personality to this unity of one with the other'. It is thus precisely in marriage that the specific logic of the family over against the public one comes to the fore. Its 'ethical core' is that the spouses become 'embedded in each other's characters as agent' and cannot think of themselves and their acting outside of their relation with the other's acting.[71] As a result, Ciavatta concludes that the 'logic of the marriage bond' is actually close to that of sibling relations as analysed in the *Phenomenology*.[72] 'For each of these relationships involves such merging of singular selves into one singular nexus, into the form of "one person"'.[73] Ciavatta points out the critical character of this logic of the family. It brings to light 'how deep-rooted and unreflective our involvements in our familial networks can be, and thus to how thoroughly our individual self-identities can be informed by intersubjective forces that are not in our immediate and conscious

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[70] Ciavatta explains this as a result of Hegel's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 68–9), in particular Antigone's final speech ('Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 169n50), the peculiar character of which we have already pointed out.

[71] Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 176.

[72] Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 170. See also Ciavatta's summary of his interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right* as 'akin to' the family of the *Phenomenology*, with reference to Antigone (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 93). He concludes:

> I will argue that, despite appearances, for Hegel even marriage involves such a prereflective identification with one's unique relationship to a particular other, for though marriage partners may voluntarily enter into their relationship as separate persons, what ultimately constitutes the *ethical* character of marriage is not simply a voluntary, self-conscious act of will . . . but rather an intimacy and orientation whereby one's specific relationship to the other self gradually comes to be woven into one's practical self-identity and into one's very bodily actuality.

[73] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 102.

control'.[74] This insight challenges any simple view of human beings as 'independent individuals, unconditionally free to reflect on, and be the self-conscious ground of, [their] own identities'.

The Inscrutable Character of the Family Tie

We turned to Ciavatta because of the impetus he seemed to give to a further exploration of the value of a mystery approach in taking into account the complex character of morality which family embodies. A mystery approach would be able to elaborate constructively on the complex, tensive combination of freedom and its 'other side' that Hegel sees exemplified in the family. In Ciavatta's interpretation, this general framework of the great ethical issue of how to understand acting between freedom and givenness emerges much more clearly than in those of Butler and the feminist views. Ciavatta emphasises that there are different levels in making moral decisions and in acting: there is a personal one, but there is also the pre-personal level of the family. Ciavatta interprets Hegel as expressing precisely this pre-personal level in terms of a greater ethical weight of nature. One may object that Ciavatta's view is too clear-cut to fit a mystery approach. Ciavatta understands family as the setting where the 'alienation and estrangement' to which nature gives rise due to its indifference, externality and contingency is overcome (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 5). In the setting of family, people may feel 'at home' in nature or the world and may develop a 'sense of belonging'.[75] He emphasises the relation between the nature discourse and that of the immediateness of feeling, as the un- or pre-reflective level that is primary in ethics. Family is the 'main locus' (20) of this level of morality, and this is why Hegel has to pay attention to this phenomenon in his analysis of how the Spirit realises itself.[76] In these firm conclusions, Ciavatta seems to go beyond the complex views of at least the *Phenomenology* and arrives at a moral theory of family that is much more clear-cut and univocal than Hegel's. A sense of mystery is not prominent in these analyses.

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[74] Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 158.
[75] Compare chapter 4, 'Feeling at Home in the Familial World', in Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*.
[76] In the introduction, Ciavatta argues: 'for Hegel the question of the meaning of "being in a family" is not, as it might seem at the outset, a merely marginal issue for philosophy, and one that is independent of Hegel's most basic metaphysical concerns'. This question gives insight into 'what it is to be a self . . . in relation to others . . . to the all-encompassing "spirit" . . . to the natural world, etc.' (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 4–5).

On the other hand, Ciavatta also emphasises the incommunicable character of the level of morality that family displays, which reminds us immediately of our understanding of family as mystery. This view is, moreover, reflected in Ciavatta's reading of Hegel's Antigone as a 'hero of the unreflective ethical demands'. Also, at this point, Ciavatta presents Hegel's thinking as critical. It goes against views of ethics as a rational deliberation on the basis of universal laws. The 'unreflective, unconscious dimension of our experience' present in our 'immediate, lived engagements' has a 'depth and richness' of meaning, Ciavatta argues, that cannot be articulated in 'conscious, rational terms' (9). This is not just a meta-ethical statement, but also something that is obvious from everyday experience.[77] Ciavatta gives the example that it is not possible for non-family members to sense the ethical authority family members have over each other. Of course, this authority can be stated in more general terms of respecting father- or motherhood, of rights of being a child or responsibilities towards siblings. Such general rules, however, would not do justice to what I actually experience in my specific relations to my family members. The inscrutability of this bond lies in that 'one would, in effect, have to *be* me . . . to fully appreciate the real significance and weight of my sense of loyalty and obligation to them' (67). Thus, as regards my relation to my father, Ciavatta argues, outsiders can 'never fully experience for themselves the *concrete immediacy* with which *his* singular presence carries *for me* the full weight of his ethical stature, the way *his* voice *in particular* – in its familiarity to *my* ears *in particular* – already and immediately resonates with the significance of his being my father and of his recognition of me as "one of his own"' (68). The authority of family members over each other is not based on universal rules, as is true of the sphere of civil society and the state. It is immediately experienced due to the intertwinement of their lives. Family members cannot perceive each other as strangers or individuals among others, just like outsiders cannot conceive of them as family members.

The inscrutable character of the family tie is also pointed out in an inward sense. Acting on the family tie deprives the individual of his or her self-awareness and conscious decision-making, as was visible in Ciavatta's view of Antigone as the 'non-conscientious objector'. Ciavatta argues that 'certain aspects of the singular self are systematically denied or concealed

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[77] As regards the *Phenomenology*, Ciavatta argues that, despite its 'rationalist, or overly intellectualist' character, it is this level of 'concrete, lived experience of human practical existence' that is spelled out with respect to the big questions of metaphysics and logic implied in it (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 10).

within the familial realm' (89). This may be called the paradox of the 'law of singularity' that characterises the family. While this law is concerned with the recognition of the singular as non-substitutable and incomparable, it also conceals the individual by the force of the law itself – that is, by privileging the family tie as the basis for acting above individual rational choice based on universal rules. In bringing to light this moment of 'dispossession' of oneself and 'concealing' from oneself present in family life, Hegel provides an 'alternative model of human agency' (90).

A third moment that resonates with a mystery approach, finally, is Ciavatta's warning that Hegel's alternative ethical model should not be misunderstood as 'a normative ideal' of moral acting in general. Rather, it makes us aware of a 'real potentiality inherent in self-consciousness itself' that is the condition of the independently acting individual (90). Ciavatta also speaks of this potential of the family sphere as 'a structurally necessary background condition' or 'a sort of spiritual bedrock' upon which 'all of the more developed and reflective practices of intersubjective recognition are founded' (8–9).[78] Firm though 'bedrock' may sound, acting on the family tie should not be seen as a clear-cut moral rule. Ciavatta rather calls attention to the potency of the unreflective basis from which conscious moral reflection starts. Together with his emphasis on the inscrutable character of this unreflective family morality, the incommunicability of its experience to outsiders, and the concealment of the individual family member, these aspects deepen the understanding of the family tie as mystery.

Acknowledging Inextricable Relations and an Open View of Family

It is precisely this thinking in terms of 'necessity' and 'stages' or 'bedrocks' that Butler would regard as morally dangerous because of its conservative implications, the tendency to turn the contingent into a hard necessity. Nevertheless, she would agree with Ciavatta's project of correcting a one-sided ethical starting point that focusses on the free, rationally choosing individual and the force of universal rules. Both Butler and Ciavatta call for attention to the inscrutable ways people are implicated in each other and become a self or become aware of themselves through intersubjective recognition. To that extent, both of them have a sense of mystery. Butler would not agree, however, with taking family as 'most fully exemplifying'

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[78] According to Ciavatta, there is a 'tendency to downplay or neglect' this importance in Hegel scholarship (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 11).

this mystery character of morality.[79] She views this interdependence as something we are confronted with unremittingly, in all kinds of settings and not primarily in the family. Butler's aim in pointing out this interdependence is to make us reflect on its limits: who are the ones with whom we show or do not show solidarity by, for example, grieving over their death? From Butler's perspective, the fiercest criticism may be that a focus on family as the exemplary case of incommunicable interdependence suggests that 'family' is somehow an unambiguous category, especially when distinguished from 'the state' or the public sphere. Thus, it simply endorses dominant ways of family life and organising the public sphere and lacks the critical power to challenge the exclusion of minorities from it. Butler's aim is to 'overcome the schism' – dominant in Arendt – between 'acting and interdependency', as categories belonging to the public and private sphere respectively (*Notes Toward*, 45). Acting is always already potentially political as well as determined by interdependence. This does not become visible if one approaches family as the exemplary sphere of interdependence and acting on intuitions or feelings.

Earlier, we concluded that Butler's critique should be taken into account in our project to preclude any easy getting beyond the impasse and heading for the mystery. Does this critique not hit Ciavatta just as well? He does not consider other candidates than the family as possible contexts for discovering the unreflective level of morality, nor does he go into the problematic conservative tendency inherent in the use of family as an unambiguous category. This may be a result in part of the fact that his primary aim is to understand Hegel. He does concur with many aspects of Hegel's approach as convincing for today as well. His advocacy of a Hegelian revaluation of the unreflective level of ethics does not inspire him to spell out why precisely family is the context in which we discover this level. The examples he gives of family life mainly serve to illustrate the basic character of recognition and intersubjective intertwinement. They point out the impossibility of experiencing oneself apart from the other. Such examples seem to be related primarily to the high intensity of the relationships in the family: the continuity of the relationship and the fact that much time is spent together. Ciavatta does not go into an explanation of how the 'merging with others' comes into existence precisely in the family. Is this absence of explanations or justifications a result of a lack of intellectual rigour, which may be risky given the excluding power of such family notions? Or may it be interpreted as his analysis of the distinct character

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[79] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 8, compare 43, 52.

of family with a highly necessary feeling for its inscrutable character, its being a mystery?

Ciavatta's way of describing the intertwinement of family relations by means of brief examples like that of the father may be analysed as an example of what Marcel calls the 'evoking' of family as mystery. Moreover, the aim of Ciavatta's evocation of the unreflective character of morality in a family is to recall a side of morality that has become obscured. This critical purpose resonates with the aim of Marcel's evocation of mystery as recalling something that 'previously one had entirely lost sight of' (Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 66). Ciavatta's attention to the inherently unconscious and incommunicable character of the family tie gives a better understanding of this obscuring. Second, Ciavatta's view of family does not seem incompatible with a fundamentally open way of speaking about the family. His focus on the immediate and unreflective character of what he calls the 'experience of inextricability' in the sphere of family seems a good example of an approach that precludes the occurrence of the question for the 'legitimate forms' of family life.[80] Family exists wherever this inextricability is experienced. Of course, the difficulty lies in that recognition within the context of family is not just any form of recognition that results from the feeling of being 'implicated in each other' and of being non-substitutable, nor is it any experience of dispossession of oneself rooted in the experience of a larger unity of which one is a part. As a result, the question of what in family leads to this specific kind of experience may arise again. The aspect of durably and intimately living together, which leads to knowing each other 'inside out', is at least implied in the way Ciavatta thinks of this recognition, although he does not refer to this explicitly. Although this aspect may be associated with some 'traditional' picture of children growing up with their so-called biological parents, it does not in principle exclude other forms.

This may be illustrated by relating Ciavatta's insights to some examples of family experiences in 'non-standard' forms of family relations from Robinson's *Housekeeping*. We may think of the strong presence of Helen – Ruth and Lucille's deceased mother – in Ruth's experience. Many of Ciavatta's characterisations of the intimacy of family apply to this relation, although it is no longer physically real, and Helen has been

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[80] In his article 'The Family and the Bonds of Recognition', Ciavatta explains this Hegelian analysis of the 'experience of inextricability' in relation to modern psychotherapy, and describes it as 'those whom I recognize as family (for better or worse) are those with whom I am involved in an ongoing, unreflectively constituted practical cycle or system of interaction, and those whom I have internalized into my very way of relating to myself, others, and the world at large' (78).

'replaced' first by her mother and later by her sister. In a similar way, Ruth keeps dreaming of a reunification with Lucille after she has consciously left the family. Ruth recounts with delicate attention their intimate sharing of all the uncertain times after their mother's death. Their bond is another example that the family tie does not cease to be meaningful when family members are no longer in each other's presence, here because Lucille leaves. As regards the danger of exclusion that Butler points out, the relationship between Ruth and Sylvie is an interesting example. At the end of *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie are anything but dutiful citizens of Fingerbone. They become transients and in that sense are examples of being excluded from normal public life. However, the reason for this is not that they do not live up to the standards of dominant family life. Rather, the opposite seems true. Their firm but never explicitly formulated intention to stay together, despite Sylvie's shortcomings in 'housekeeping', has to do somehow with their being family members. This family tie is not respected by the inhabitants of Fingerbone, however. The two are excluded in spite of their apparent conformity on the level of being family members. In the neighbourhood assessment of the legitimacy of Sylvie's guardianship, running a household in a neat and orderly way is regarded as more important than family ties. Thus, examples of being 'inextricably bound up' with each other and carrying 'these others around with us in all of our dealings' are not difficult to find outside the sphere of the standard family patterns.[81] Again, this gives rise to the idea that precisely these situations in which the family tie is experienced under pressure, beyond standards and conventions, bring the family tie to light.

Comparing Ciavatta's self-evident concurrence with the Hegelian distinction of family and state with Butler's aversion towards it also finally raises questions as regards Butler's way of dealing with kinship and fundamental dependence. Is it not both too easy and too demanding? It seems to take the easy road by not giving any further thought to family as an aspect of being human. Taking Butler's 'radical kinship perspective' means considering the topic of family as closed because the notion as such would imply a reductionist perspective that fosters discrimination and exclusion. The specific familial problems of dependence and lack of recognition that result from being inextricably intertwined in this specific way thus do not receive special attention either. Moreover, Butler's refusal to go into the specific character of family may be too demanding. She aims for a more vital awareness of our fundamentally relational nature, which means an interdependence with all other human beings, even stretching

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[81] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 2.

beyond inter-human relations to the environment we live in. Is it not asking too much to pass over the everyday experiences of dependence that most people have in the context of family as not deserving separate analysis, in order to point out this relatedness on a much more general and thus abstract level? Perhaps Butler's agenda is simply too engaged with current political issues to offer room for the seemingly less acute issue of the family. If one really wants to account for the fact that human beings are 'from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond [them]selves, implicated in lives that are not [their] own', it does not seem far-fetched to also pay attention to – at least in the course of life – primary forms in which this sociality is lived in the family.[82] Of course, these primary forms may also be taken as a stimulus to acknowledge dependence and responsibilities beyond the family. That does not do away, however, with the strong ways in which these are experienced in the family, not just in positive ways, but also and even more visibly in situations of pressure and problems.

Conclusion: The Unnameable Family Tie and the Divine Law

The aim of this chapter has been to provide our investigation with enough focus to enable the ethical analysis of what family might mean, while also respecting its character as mystery. In a first, tentative way, we formulated this focus as a tie. Speaking about a tie that is specific to family implies speaking about family as a distinct sphere. In line with the character of family as mystery, we approached this tie as something that is usually not referred to explicitly among family members but is nevertheless a strong impulse for acting. Thus, the tie comes to light in different experiences and actions without being named. Following our first explorations in the novel *Housekeeping*, we noticed that it is in particular when it is under pressure and not self-evident that the tie becomes visible. In these situations it turns out to be an impulse for acting and something people are answerable to and can be called to account for. Again, however, the tie has this character of an impulse and implies responsibility without these being made explicit. The focus on the experience of a tie was also chosen because of its openness to different forms of family life. Moreover, it does not lead to what Marcel calls a 'problem approach', which lacks attention to the open, fundamental question of what family is about. Finally, the family tie seemed a good beginning because of its obvious associations with givenness. The focus on

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[82] Butler, *Precarious Life*, 28.

the family tie provided us with a starting point to engage in dialogue with different kinds of texts and thinkers. These were chosen because of their connections with the literary sparring partner of this chapter, Sophocles' *Antigone*. What has this dialogue yielded?

The Family Tie as Mystery

In this dialogue, 'the family tie' has proven a meaningful phrase that enables further analysis of what family is about. Speaking about this tie also turned out to be more complex than we suggested at first. We assumed that *Antigone* could evoke the tie in its unnameable yet strong self-evidence as a basis for acting, even sacrificing oneself. A close reading of the play, however, confronted us with the paradox that the tie is presupposed in the way the family members behave towards each other, but is interpreted in completely different ways by each of them. The tie exists, but as something that is disputed. What it is and what obligations follow from it cannot be defined in general. This character of the family tie as mystery was exemplified in that no general formulation of the law to bury one's kin is given. We subsequently analysed these outcomes critically by taking into account Judith Butler's views. Her reading of *Antigone* questions the heart of our project by objecting to any approach to family as a separate sphere over against the public one. Does not the idea of a distinct family life based on an ineffable tie lead to an uncritical acceptance of dominant family patterns and the exclusion of alternative ones? Is not all acting, also that of the family, contingent, political, based on specific norms that should be open for discussion with respect to their justness? Butler directs these questions primarily at Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone*, which led us to our own reading of Hegel's view of family in the *Phenomenology*. We expected to find an emphatic analysis of family as a sphere of its own, but we arrived at a different conclusion. In dealing with family, Hegel brings to the fore first of all the complexity of the interrelatedness of morality and what he calls 'nature' or the 'immediate'. Ciavatta's analysis of Hegel's family views finally enabled a more constructive elaboration of what the moral character of the family tie might be. Ciavatta also emphasised its unconscious, unreflective character and the corresponding problem of communicating it.

The dialogue with these interpretations of *Antigone* thus points out the complexity of the family tie, its disputable character, its dangers and its incommunicability. These are not simply negative or critical contributions to our project, however, nor do they simply serve as warnings against

possible pitfalls. The moments of an impasse in understanding the family tie confirmed and deepened the insight into family as mystery. We recognised at several moments Marcel's insight that the inscrutability of family has to do with the fact that we are personally involved in the issue and cannot deal with the meaning of family as a general problem which can be solved objectively. In addition to this basic sense, *Antigone* evokes family as mystery in that the family tie becomes visible much more as a question than as a well-delineated fact with clear implications for acting. Thus, the family tie appears as something family members have to relate to, something they are answerable to, but not in the sense that the behaviour corresponding to it can be formulated in general. Insofar as the family tie appears in Antigone's act of burying Polynices, it becomes visible as a tie that goes beyond the boundaries of life and means a responsibility to the deceased as well, to Polynices as well as to her parents. Butler's view contributes to a more general awareness of being related as mystery by emphasising the opacity of acting. Acting always takes place on the basis of and is conditioned by a fundamental relatedness and dependence on others of which we are not fully aware and that is beyond rational comprehension. Although she does not associate this with the family, she underlines the view of relationality as mysterious. This may even be seen as a reason behind her opposition to family as an obvious, clear, distinct sphere. Such obviousness does not tie in with the opaque character of interrelatedness. Hegel also struggles with this opacity in trying to come to grips with the influence of nature in morality. Finally, Ciavatta acknowledged it most fully in his analysis of family as confronting us with the importance of the level of feeling, and immediate, unreflective acting in morality.

Acting on the Family Tie as Obeying a Divine Law?

There is one aspect implied in the character of family as mystery as inspired by Marcel's use that we did not yet evaluate separately – that is, that of the feeling for the sacred. References to this religious level are not hard to find in *Antigone*, as we already indicated in our analysis of the play. From the start of the play in the dialogue with Ismene, Antigone claims divine approval of her decision to bury her brother. Over against Creon, the elderly also suggest that the gods are involved in the mysterious burial, which Creon of course fiercely rejects. Standing accused before Creon, Antigone also invokes the law she has acted on as divine and as such, opposes it to Creon's 'mortal' proclamations. Here, we find the characterisation of the 'unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods', which

Hegel also quotes: 'For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but for ever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed.'[83] We already pointed out that Antigone never provides a formulation of what this divine law proclaims. It is precisely its unwritten character that makes it a divine law. As such, this also suggests that it is obvious; it does not need to be made known. Tiresias points out to Creon that the gods are offended at his refusal to bury and refers to the divine refusal of prayers and sacrifices as proof. Creon denies this accusation first by claiming that human beings cannot 'pollute the gods'. When he changes his mind after the elderly confirm Tiresias' counsel Creon's confession does not consider this point of the divine character of the obligation to bury. On the contrary, Creon bewails his unhappy fate, explaining it as 'that a god bearing great weight struck my head, and hurled me into ways of cruelty' (1271–5). He does not explicitly admit that he has willingly broken divine law.

In the recent interpretations of *Antigone* analysed in this chapter, this claim of obeying divine laws does not receive elaborate attention. Insofar as these readings emphasise the exceptional, rebellious character of Antigone's act, as in Butler and other feminist approaches, this does not come as a surprise. Following the divine law would be at odds with the idea of a heroic Antigone who consciously arrives at her decision on the basis of rational deliberations. Emphasising the divine character of the law she obeys would detract from the public character of her deed and its critical power. When we read the play with an eye to the character of the family tie as mystery, however, this incommensurability does not rise. Rather, the references to the unknown origin of the law and its unwritten character become apt formulations of this character of mystery. Invoking this divine authority need not to be counted against the heroic character of Antigone's acting. For precisely the staging of the play as a family conflict shows that not all family members are sensitive to this divine call to bury one's relatives and to be prepared to risk their lives for it. Is her acting less heroic if she is not following her own autonomous decision but consciously obeying a divine law? On the other hand, the unwritten character of the law does indeed point to its self-evident character. Antigone is not the hero inspired by a call no one could have heard. What she does seems to be a self-evident duty: burying the dead, in particular the dead to whom we are intimately related. Her obeying a divine law is being answerable to the family tie, which is also a phenomenon of everyday life. Her heroic character, then, lies in her highlighting the importance of this tie in the public sphere.

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[83] *Antigone*, 456–7, see also note 44.

Thus, she becomes a dangerous rebel. Introducing the family tie in public breaks open the injustice of Creon's ruling and unmasks the cowardice of the bystanders.

That the family tie functions to break open the injustice of Creon's system can be considered more generally. Many ideologies, from slavery to Marxist communism, have tried to eliminate the family tie because of the danger it poses to the totalitarian order, or attempted to incorporate it completely into this order as in National Socialism. The sphere of family is always risky because of its closed character, its being a sphere of its own out of reach of the state. However, this should not be misunderstood as implying that it is clear what it means to respect the family tie or that it is an obvious good, a sphere in which everything works out well. Pointing out the critical potential of the family tie is not simply a call to cherish the family. That would be a glorification of it. Paying attention to the divine character of the law Antigone follows should not be misinterpreted as implying such a magnification either. Nor does it imply that we know precisely what the family tie is or are simply called to respect it.

The question that rises when we do take these Antigonean references to the gods into account is why it is precisely the sphere of family that permits us to catch, to quote Marcel, 'a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life' (*Homo Viator*, 82). Why is it that the family tie brings one into contact with a transcendent dimension and a corresponding attitude of what Hegel calls 'dutiful reverence' (*Pietät*) or piety? It is remarkable that this piety arises in a setting of everyday life. Hegel emphasises the immediacy and naturalness of acting in this setting as well as its universal, non-contingent character. He highlights this character in two forms of family life that reflect the divine law. First, it is exemplified in the honouring of the dead family members as 'the perfect *divine* law'. This act separates the dead family members from the impersonal category of being dead and raises them to the level of ethical universality – that is, without separating or distinguishing them from the community as particular individuals. By honouring their dead family members, people take part in the destruction that has befallen them. Second, Hegel relates the divine law to sisterhood as the highest ethical form, the level of universality. In the sister's relationship to the brother, she is not inspired by the particularity of desire but intuitively aware of the divine law. Why does Hegel highlight these aspects as exemplifying the divine law?

It is here that we can anticipate the theme of Chapter 3, that of givenness. 'Givenness' might be a term that lends itself to expressing the common characteristics of both the moment of acting towards a dead

family member and acting in sibling relations. These are settings in which one is confronted with the inescapability of life: they concern relations which are not chosen. People find themselves in these situations, but not in the sense that these are facts with a self-evident meaning or a meaning that can be proved. People are put in a specific position. This position has strong implications, including moral ones, but not ones that can be formulated in general. Moral duty seems to be experienced as a divine one precisely at the moment when it cannot be formulated in concrete rules nor ascribed to contingent, particular feelings. It is a duty that is implicated in the family tie. The family tie becomes a given in the sense that this duty is not chosen and is inescapable, as well as in the sense that a deeper meaning, perhaps life itself, is experienced. This burial has to be performed because life itself is at stake – it cannot be left undone. In these respects, the experience of givenness resonates with our approach to family as mystery. This mystery character relates to the observation that givenness cannot be spelled out in general as a rule for all family members. It is a mystery also in that not every family member seems sensitive to this experience of givenness. Not every family member is sensitive to this moment of being put in a position of respecting an inescapable situation regarding its deeper, moral implications. Not everyone is open to the sacred.

For Antigone, facing the death of her brother means burying him despite his treason and having to pay with her own life. This is her divine duty, implied in her sisterhood, so it seems. For Ismene, however, sisterhood becomes a moment of 'givenness', not when she is faced with her brother's death, but when she is faced with her sister's death. When Antigone is sentenced to death, she shows solidarity with her sister and finally also with her dead brother. Creon, on the other hand, refuses the position the family tie puts him in. For him, there are no eternal laws: he proclaims the laws of the moment, for laws must be relevant to the time in which they are formulated, open to the contingency of the present. The family tie is nothing outside of punishing both sisters for the burial and finding his son and wife dead. What counts for him is whether the laws are respected, whether one is a dutiful citizen of the polis or an enemy, a traitor. Thus, he is portrayed as lacking sensitivity to the sacred. The attitude of 'dutiful reverence' necessary to experience a given interdependence seems alien to him. His answer to the appeal of the family tie is a negative one.

The references to the notion of givenness in this reflection on mystery and sensitivity to the sacred character arise on the threshold to Chapter 3,

where it becomes our main focus. In that chapter, we will ask what might be the moral significance of characterising the family tie as something non-chosen, as already there. In analysing the ethical weight of this givenness, the question of its sacred character will inevitably return. Here, we will also need to go into the most well-known formulation of this givenness as something 'natural', a relation of blood, biology or genetics. The critical voices of this chapter will of course stay with us, for the dangers of claiming absoluteness for the contingent still loom large. In very different ways, however, Hegel and his interpreters, Butler and Ciavatta in particular, also have deepened our understanding of the 'other side' of freedom and its critical relevance for an ethics of our time. Thus, they have confirmed the ethical tasks of accounting for experiences of givenness and also of dependence as urgent ones. In Chapter 3, we investigate what family as a phenomenon can reveal to help us make sense of givenness in our time.

CHAPTER 3

Family and Givenness as Mystery

In Chapter 2, we looked at the question of what family might mean via the notion of the family tie. We examined this tie with respect to its unreflective, immediate and everyday character, as having strong implications for acting and as something to which members hold one another answerable. In reading *Antigone*, however, we discovered that, although the tie seems self-evident and need not be named, it is not obvious what precisely the tie implies for who the family members are and how they should act. Thus, the tie leads to conflict.

Presupposed in this understanding of a tie is that family is a distinct sphere with specific responsibilities regarding one's behaviour. This presupposition was critically questioned by going into discussion with other interpretations of *Antigone*, especially Judith Butler's. We discussed whether and how ethics can take into account the notion of an intuited bond without falling into the trap of essentialising – that is, of fixing contingent cultural norms into normative standards beyond debate. In Hegel's view of family and, more clearly, in David Ciavatta's interpretation of it, we found ways of expressing what the family tie could mean which cannot be characterised as 'fixing'. To the contrary, their analyses are complex and ambiguous. As such, they deepened our initial approach to family as mystery.

Finally, the idea of the unnameable family tie was explored with respect to its obvious character and transcendent anchoring, evoked by Antigone's claim that she is acting on the basis of divine law. Ciavatta elaborated Antigone's actions as exemplifying the unreflective, immediate kind of acting that is characteristic of family. This reading is inspired by Hegel's understanding of the divine law as something of which one is intuitively and not consciously aware. It is not the result of conscious deliberation, but of accepting an immediate appeal. Others criticise these views of Antigone's acting as 'familial' and therefore unreflective and point to its nonconformism and rebelliousness. This disagreement raised the question

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of whether Antigone's heroic status is necessarily reduced by what is clearly a unique sensitivity to divine law. Is it not rebellious to invoke the family tie in public? All family members are answerable to the tie, but Antigone is the only one who responds to it immediately.

The question of why it is precisely in the everyday setting of family life that this experience of divine duty arises gave the impulse for a first exploration of the notion of givenness. The given character of family was also touched upon at various moments in our earlier analyses of the family tie. Butler's criticism of the idea that family is a distinct sphere concerns precisely the suggestion that it is given or something natural, outside the political realm and thus of history. In Hegel's view of family, givenness is addressed when Hegel explores the difficult place of the natural in family as a moral phenomenon. Ciavatta reformulates this difficulty as one of spiritualising nature, which flows from the special connectedness of family where individual identity does not entail separation from the other. Givenness also resonates with the immediate, quasi-automatic character of Antigone's actions that Ciavatta highlights. In our final discussion on the divine character of the duty implied in family as found in *Antigone*, we then introduced the notion of givenness more emphatically. This could express, we suggested, Antigone's experience of the family tie as inescapable and as implying moral duties of a divine nature. Antigone experiences a call in the family setting that puts her in the position to respect it. This call is nowhere formulated in an explicit rule that, for instance, family members are responsible for honouring their dead relatives. It is unwritten but therefore seems self-evident, 'written into the very nature of things', as Ciavatta argues. This makes one wonder why not all family members respond to the call of this tie. Do they not experience the family tie as given? Maybe they feel the appeal of the tie but consciously reject it. At least at the end of the play, the audience is left with the question of whether one should regard the family tie as given in the strong sense of implying a moral duty of divine origin. Antigone's acting on this tie is not presented as straightforwardly exemplary. The spectator might easily sympathise with the moments in which Ismene and Creon reject the call of the tie in favour of their own lives or the well-being of the city.

With these reflections on how the characters in *Antigone* act on the tie as something given, and in particular as a given in everyday life, we have entered a field that needs to be explored as such. In Chapter 1, we introduced givenness and dependence as the central lenses for investigating what family might mean in a moral sense. We use these terms as the two main headings that could indicate the most important challenges family confronts us with in our time and context. They seem crucial to understanding current controversies about

family. Givenness is a difficult aspect of life in a time that emphasises the importance of choice and human freedom and our power to change things, especially in the relational sphere. In Chapter 2, Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone* exposed these difficulties of treating 'the other side of freedom' with due attention in ethics. The great interest in Hegel's views in our time – despite his seemingly outdated understanding of gender, for example – also indicated the topical importance of discussing the theme of givenness. In this chapter, we explore possible constructive elaborations of this givenness of family, as well as views that criticise it in particular because of its conservative and fixing associations. They emphasise the 'made' character of family. Our aim is to find out how much weight the concept of givenness can bear in ethical reflection on family. By this, we mean taking the experiences behind the term 'given' into account without ending up in the deadlock that opposes givenness to family as 'made'. We look for a different understanding of givenness beyond this opposition that can emerge precisely by reflecting on the phenomenon of family itself, viewed as mystery.

Again, we will start by stepping outside the contemporary debates on the given or made character of family and analyse artistic expressions of family. We will discuss two paintings of the Holy Family by Rembrandt. In these paintings, ordinary family life – the everyday reality of life in Rembrandt's day – is readily apparent. This ordinary family is painted as an image of the Holy Family. The ordinary family seems worthy as such of representing the Holy Family. Life as given in its everyday character is taken seriously as revealing something beyond it, a surplus of meaning. We will take this as our first access to the theme of 'givenness'.

Rembrandt's Image of an Ordinary Family Scene

The Role of the Ordinary in Rembrandt's Holy Family

Among the great paintings of the Holy Family, those of Rembrandt stand out because of their expression of intimate domesticity.[1] Especially in two paintings of Mary, the baby Jesus, and, in the background, Joseph from

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[1] Part of this chapter elaborates aspects discussed in my article 'Telling Images: On the Value of a "Strong Image" for Theological Ethics', in *Die Zeit der Bilder: Ikonische Repräsentation und Temporalität*, ed. by Michael Moxter and Markus Firchow (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 144–60. On Rembrandt's Holy Family scenes, compare H. Sachs, 'Familie, Heilige', in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Vol. 2, ed. by Engelbert Kirschbaum and Wolfgang Braunfels (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 4–7, at 6–7; Adam Adolf, 'Heilige Familie, I. Verehrung', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. 4, ed. by Michael Buchberger and Walter Kasper (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 1276–7, at 1277.

Figure 3.1 Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *The Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain*, 1646 (Kassel)

1645 (*The Holy Family with Angels*, St Petersburg, see Figure 3.2) and 1646 (*The Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain*, Kassel, see Figure 3.1), the viewer is struck first of all by the realistic, everyday character of the scene and of the figures.[2] We see a real mother taking care of her child by attentively watching it sleep in a cradle or by lifting it from the cradle and holding it to her breast, perhaps to comfort it. The setting is simple and sober. The wooden floor is quite visible. A single piece of furniture is positioned prominently on it: the child's wicker basket with its blankets and sheets. In the painting 'with frame', the woman is barefoot, sitting on a small sofa. A fire is burning on the floor close to the cradle, and a cat basks in its warmth. In the dim background of both paintings, the figure of a man bending forward with a woodworking tool in his hands can be descried. The presence of other tools at the back of the room gives a good

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[2] For brevity's sake, I refer to *The Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain* as the Kassel painting or the Kassel Holy Family and to *The Holy Family with Angels* as the St Petersburg Holy Family. Apart from these two, which were painted in close temporal conjunction, there are also other Holy Family paintings by Rembrandt, but these are less relevant to our theme of the relationship between the holy and the everyday.

Figure 3.2 Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *The Holy Family with Angels*, 1645
(St Petersburg) (Photo by Alexander Koksharov, © The State Hermitage Museum)

clue to his occupation. We can see his workshop, which also seems to be the location of ordinary family life.

The St Petersburg Holy Family contains very non-ordinary elements no less prominently as well which lead the viewer into the 'holy' character of

the scene. A group of little angels on the left – chubby children with birdlike wings – is the most prominent of these elements. One of them is depicted completely en face with his child's body and is stretching out his arms like a crucifix figure.[3] He looks down, like the other angels and the woman, at the child asleep in the basket. The presence of the angels leaves no doubt about the family painted here. Consequently, the man in the background should be Joseph. He is bending under a heavy beam or yoke resting on his shoulder, thus recalling another scene in the passion narrative: Jesus (or Simon of Cyrene) stumbling towards Golgotha weighed down by the heavy burden of the cross.[4] The woman must be Mary. She is sitting beside the cradle, which she touches with her right hand while holding a large book in her left hand, undoubtedly a Bible. The light falls on the opened book. Mary seems to have been reading it when she turns to the crib to rearrange the blankets and then looks at the sleeping child.[5] She raises her eyebrows, which makes her look surprised.

Similar obvious signs of the holy character of the scene are not present in the Kassel painting. Here we simply see Mary tenderly holding Jesus and Joseph in the background, working with his carpenter's tools, albeit in a similar position as in the other painting. Their faces are painted at a distance, so their expressions are not clearly visible. The look on the woman's face seems to be one more of worry than of surprise. If we follow her gaze, she is looking into the fire below at her feet, not at the child she holds close to herself. The child is standing on her lap on one foot, and the sole of the other is turned towards the viewer, while the child stretches out his arms to the woman's neck. Her hands are folded around the middle of the child, crossing each other as if in prayer. Apart from this sober scene, another element catches the eye: the scene is surrounded by a painted picture frame and a large curtain fastened on it. The curtain is painted as if it has been moved aside.

As such, the frame and curtain attract attention, but they are even more remarkable in comparison with the St Petersburg painting. What do the

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[3] Compare Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt: The Holy Family* (St Petersburg: Gerson Lectures Foundation, 1995), 17n28.

[4] The depiction of Jesus (or Simon of Cyrene) carrying the cross is especially clear from Rembrandt's 'Drawing in Bayonne', a compositional study for his painting *The Holy Family with Angels*. Haverkamp-Begemann suggests that the beam looks like a yoke, thus recalling a text like Matt. 11:30: 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (*Rembrandt*, 18).

[5] As Haverkamp-Begemann points out, this combination of looking and reading is also present in another painting by Rembrandt (*Le ménage du Menuisier*) where the figure of St Anna, with a Bible on her lap, pushes aside the cloths covering Jesus in order to better see him (*Rembrandt*, 15, 19). In both cases, this 'reading and seeing' can be interpreted as a 'recognition motif' representing the recognition of the Christ child by Mary or Anna upon her reading of the coming Saviour in the Bible (16, 19n23).

frame and curtain add to the painting? Whatever further interpretations may be given, they primarily emphasise that the image is a painting, a work of art. This emphasis makes the viewer of the painting aware of his or her own act of watching. It is a specific kind of watching: watching an image, a painting, a piece of art. Why should the viewer be reminded of the image character of the painting? It seems to be making a statement in comparison to paintings without such a framing. Does the scene itself contain any clue as to the reasons for this framing? The scene is remarkably 'realistic' in its unadorned everydayness. At first sight, before the figure of the man with the woodworking tools has been descried in the dim background, no specific details call for attention or give a clue to what kind of scene or family is present here. The frame changes this experience. It contrasts, or so it seems, with the everydayness and unemphatic character of the scene. The frame turns it into an emphatic, conscious image. It may seem ordinary, but it should be watched intensely as long as the curtain is pulled aside, which may be for only a short time. The frame thus at least calls for special awareness of the image which – precisely because of its apparently realistic character – may at first sight seem all too well known. It invites further thinking about why such a simple everyday scene is deemed worthy of being painted. The frame and open curtain thus make the viewer aware that this painting is more than just a very apt expression of intimate domesticity.

One may wonder, however, whether this framing of the painting is enough to make the viewer aware of the specific, even holy character of the family that is depicted. Unsurprisingly, the first scientific catalogue of the painting gallery of Kassel in Germany from 1888 gives a double title to the work: '"The Holy Family" also known as "The Woodcutter's Family"'.[6] In a religious context, this question of whether an everyday family scene may be enough to express and evoke the Holy Family is a normative question as well. Does the everyday somehow do justice to the worthiness of the Holy Family? Or does it lessen it, domesticate it, undo its holiness? In 1875, the Swiss art historian Jacob Burckhardt expressed a criticism of this kind when he remarked about the painting: 'if this is not a profanation, what would be?'[7]

Recently, however, the art historian Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann questioned the aura of domesticity and ordinariness that the scenes of

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[6] '"Die Heilige Familie", bekannt unter dem Namen "die Holzhackerfamilie"', cited in Wolfgang Kemp, *Rembrandt: Die Heilige Familie, oder die Kunst, einen Vorhang zu lüften* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1986), 6) from the catalogue of the 'Königlichen Gemäldegalerie zu Kassel' from 1888 by Otto Eisemann, 145.

[7] 'Wenn dies keine Profanation ist, was wäre noch eine?', cited in Kemp, *Rembrandt*, 6.

the 1645 and 1646 paintings seem to have.[8] In his view, Rembrandt is much more interested in telling the story of the Bible and incorporating motives from traditional iconography.[9] What is more, the 'delimitation of space' by means of the frame and curtain in the Kassel painting is something Rembrandt uses only for religious scenes (23). Haverkamp-Begemann interprets it as emphasising the difference between our world and that of the Bible. Here, it may add a revelatory impulse. The curtain that is pushed aside reveals to the viewer what had been veiled (19). It may be seen as a parallel to the woman figure in the St Petersburg version, who looks up from her reading of the Bible and sees the cradle, thus revealing the special status of the child and relating it to the biblical revelation. In Haverkamp-Begemann's interpretation, the ordinariness of the scene serves its religious meaning: Rembrandt 'used the quotidian to make the spiritual persuasive' (19). Haverkamp-Begemann does not, however, clarify the sense in which precisely this everyday character makes the spiritual 'persuasive'. Why is the 'spiritual' not depicted in a 'spiritual' way, for example, more in the style of the angels appearing in the St Petersburg Holy Family?

The art historian Wolfgang Kemp, on the other hand, does interpret the painting with frame as remarkably quotidian. He explains this as a sign of the Protestant context in which Rembrandt was working.[10] As Catholic painters also turned to the intimate and anecdotal in the post-Reformation Low Countries, the Protestant perspective had to be expressed by leaving out explicit references to holiness and by an increase in the 'profane and everyday elements' (17). Moreover, religious scenes seemed less suited to private use by that time, which may have influenced the depiction of the Holy Family as a painting of the genre of the interior paintings (19–20). As regards the framing of the painting, Kemp argues it does not have the grand, festive, revelatory working of similar veiling and unveiling constructions of earlier periods (63). Here, revelation is 'private' (67). The size of the painting adds to this. It is very small; one can only see it as a single viewer by coming close to the painting. One then observes an intimate scene which breaths a 'completeness' (68) as it indicates and connects the elementary facts of life: human being and animal, husband and wife, old and young, a house, warmth, food, care and labour. Intimacy or privacy, however, means that it

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[8] Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt*, 12, 23.
[9] Haverkamp-Begemann gives several examples of these traditional motives in these and other holy families by Rembrandt: Joseph asleep, Mary and the child asleep, Mary holding the foot of Jesus (*hypsilotera*; *Rembrandt*, 10), *Maria lattante*, Mary sitting on the ground as the virgin of humility (12), Joseph making a yoke (18).
[10] Kemp, *Rembrandt*, 15–17.

is not easy for the viewer to relate to it; the scene is closed. It is within these dimensions that the frame and curtain receive a deeper meaning, that of mediating: they emphasise the inner and the outer, but by doing so also bring the outside, the viewer, into relation with the intimate scene (68–9). Their function is thus a double one: they increase the intimacy of the scene and personally invite the viewer to behold it.

The Relation between the Sacred and the Ordinary and Its Moral Implications

Viewing *The Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain* side by side with *The Holy Family with Angels* enables us to pick up where we left off with *Antigone* at the end of Chapter 2. There, we reflected on the divine character Antigone claims for the law that rules her acting, which is explained only in terms of being 'unwritten'. This law is presented already in the first scene as a self-evident duty, which is somehow implied in the everyday phenomenon of the family tie. Antigone invokes this law over against Ismene and Creon, but does not make it explicit in the sense of a clear rule that formulates this family duty in general. At this point, we introduced the language of givenness: Antigone experiences family as given whereas Ismene does so only at a later stage and not at all for Creon. *Antigone* shows that not all family members are sensitive to the sacred character of the moral call implied in this everyday phenomenon. They react differently to the family reality. They might hear the call but deny it or may not even be aware of it. When faced with their interdependence, they do not respect it. Thus, family does not awaken any attitude of piety in Creon. That does not, however, do away with the emphatic staging of the issue of the burial of a traitor as a family issue in which divine law comes to light. The play confronts the observer with the question of why family is a setting in which one might hear the divine call or, in Marcel's formulation, 'glimpse' the bond with the sacred. These relations between the ordinary and the divine resonate with how we introduced Rembrandt's Holy Family paintings. Antigone could be said to act on the basis of something in ordinary life, the family tie as a 'given' that is expressed in her pious response, which acknowledges a divine call implied in it. In Rembrandt's paintings, the ordinary and the divine touch as well. It is this that forms the starting point for our further explorations of the notion of givenness. The way in which Rembrandt depicts the Holy Family can be interpreted as a way of expressing the experience of givenness. Even without angels or other explicitly religious elements – as in the Kassel painting – the sober ordinary family scene seems to have a kind of power to

express and to make an appeal that makes it a worthy depiction of the Holy Family. Linked to this painting, givenness becomes a term to indicate a surplus of meaning that certain phenomena might express. The phenomenon of family, condensed in the scene of this painting, invites the observer to look differently at the ordinary.

What precisely do we suggest when taking Rembrandt's Holy Family paintings as a starting point to explore givenness? The realistic appearance of Rembrandt's Holy Family paintings could easily be regarded as expressing a high valuation of ordinary family life. Givenness then seems to mean that ordinary family life as such is something good or at least something that should be taken seriously as a meaningful place where the sacred might be found. We also noticed the frame and curtain of the Kassel painting, however. Apparently, these are also necessary, in addition to the realistic scene, for inviting the viewer to look differently at the ordinary. Family as such is not enough to evoke the holy, but framed as an unveiled scene, as Haverkamp-Begemann argues, this ordinary scene could indeed serve to make the 'spiritual persuasive'. Kemp's view of the presence of the curtain indicates another direction of interpretation. The curtain emphasises the quotidian and domestic and also fulfils a mediating role by relating the world of the viewer to the world of the intimate scene, which would remain closed off if the curtain is absent. Do these interpretations, though, take into account the provocative character of the painting, as expressed in Burckhardt's objection to it because of its profane style? Our initial observations of the painting and the exploration of their interpretations do not give us a clear picture of what givenness might mean. That is also not what is needed, however. Rather, we need room to explore different possible meanings. The disagreement between the interpreters is a clear sign this room is there.

Before we can explore this room further, we need to examine the conception of the 'holy' or 'divine' that is now introduced. We introduced Rembrandt's expression of holiness in the everyday scene with the frame and curtain to our discussion of divine law as implied in the family tie in relation to *Antigone*. Are these not, however, very different conceptions of how holy and ordinary touch on one another and therefore also of possible views of givenness? In *Antigone*, 'divine' is an abstract qualification of a self-evident but unnameable duty and law. In Rembrandt, it comes to refer to a specific Christian topos, albeit here depicted as an everyday family. In *Antigone*, family relations are of such a kind that they might arouse piety. They might have a specific moral weight in that they are the setting in which duties are experienced as divine. In the case of Rembrandt's

paintings, such a moral weight is not in the foreground. Family is presented, however, as a setting with overtones of the sacred and in that sense not entirely different from what we discovered in *Antigone*. Moreover, the fact that, for Rembrandt, an ordinary, domestic family scene can serve as a representation of the holy, of the life of Jesus as the Son of God, does give rise to ethical questions. It makes one wonder what this means for the moral status of family life. Does family life as such evoke the holy, make one aware of or enable one to 'catch a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life'? (*Homo Viator*, 82). What could this sacred or holy character of the bond mean? In both *Antigone* and Rembrandt's painting, it is something sacred that can be revealed in the most common everydayness. In the case of *Antigone*, however, the call implied in the ordinary or common family tie is revealed in the extreme situation of sacrificing one's life. In the case of Rembrandt's painting, we are far from such extremes: here is a sober depiction of a seemingly trivial moment, a mother and her infant in an intimate domestic setting. In the case of Rembrandt, can it be articulated at all what sacredness in the everyday might mean? Does the painting hint towards more elaborate meanings? Again, these questions touch on our approach to family as mystery.

Viewing the two artistic expressions side by side also gives rise to another reflection on the problems, even dangers, inherent in the ascription of such a special, even holy, status to such an ordinary scene. In Chapter 2, we discussed the problems of presenting family as a distinct sphere that somehow precedes the political one of human agreements and arrangements. Such a view would confer on family an aura of givenness as immutable and enshrined in absolute 'laws'. Thus, it becomes a sphere that somehow precedes cultural or political deliberation and flexibility. Similar problems seem to arise at any suggestion of holiness with respect to family. The artistic tradition of picturing the Holy Family then seems to be potentially problematic. Do not all Holy Family images somehow express a glorification of family life and thus serve some form of family ideology or at least an idealisation? Or is this too simple, direct and moralistic an interpretation? Could these images enable one to track a different kind of expression of the holy character with a different kind of moral implication? These overlapping questions already lead us into a further exploration of the artistic topos of the Holy Family as such. Such an exploration seems an apt next step after these first evocations of givenness via Rembrandt's realistic paintings.

The Ambiguity of the Artistic Genre of the Holy Family

The iconography of the Holy Family that shows Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in an intimate, often tender family portrait may seem to be an authentic object of Christian devotion. In fact, however, it is a late theme in Western Christian iconography and as such, a remarkable development. Building on the representations of the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Flight into Egypt that were popular in the Middle Ages, it became an independent scene that flourished only from the Renaissance onwards. The Counter-Reformation in particular played an important role in the rise in popularity of the Holy Family as a theme in art.[11] The modern period, especially the nineteenth century, is consequently known for its strongly idealised genre paintings of the Holy Family. Small works of this kind became very popular. Because of their largely instrumental function as well as promoting a certain family ideology, they are not highly esteemed as works of art. The Holy Family was visualised as a moral example in a time when family life was thought to be threatened. This is also apparent from the numerous societies that have arisen with the Holy Family as their patron saint and in the founding of the Roman Catholic Feast of the Holy Family (1893 and 1921).[12]

If one looks at the place of the Holy Family in the Bible, the popularity of the topos is anything but obvious. The three do not figure as a nuclear family at the heart of the Gospel stories. They are present as a family in the Nativity and early childhood scenes, but these stories are marginal in comparison to the Gospels as a whole. From the start, they are a rather deviant family, with Mary pregnant not by Joseph, but through the Holy Spirit, and Jesus the son of God the Father and not of Joseph. The New Testament refers to Jesus' brothers and sisters, but it is precisely in relation to them and also in relation to his mother, Mary, that Jesus displays a rather hostile attitude. They are explicitly opposed to his followers, whom he calls his brothers and sisters, thus placing them above his natural family.[13] Hatred of or breaking with one's family is even called a condition

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[11] Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, Vol. II/2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 149; Sachs, 'Familie, Heilige', 4–6; Adolf, 'Heilige Familie', 1277; Klemens Richter, 'Familie, heilige', in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 3, ed. by Hans D. Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski and Eberhard Jüngel (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 25; Hildegard Erlemann, *Die Heilige Familie. Ein Tugendvorbild der Gegenreformation im Wandel der Zeit. Kult und Ideologie*, Schriftenreihe zur religiösen Kultur, Vol. 1 (Muenster: Ardey-Verlag, 1993), especially chapters 5 and 6.

[12] Adolf, 'Heilige Familie', 1277; Richter, 'Familie', 25; Erlemann, *Die Heilige Familie*, for example, 15, 19, 167ff.

[13] Mark 3:34–35, Matt. 12:48–50, Luke 8:21.

of following Jesus.[14] It is not difficult to observe in the post-biblical developments of Christendom a counter-familial tendency ranging from the desert ascetics of early Christianity to the institution of celibacy for the clergy and the flourishing of monasticism. How, then, did this representation of the Holy Family become so popular? Is this late occurrence not another sign of its ideological character? Given the biblical traditions and later developments, the idea that 'family values' are part of a Christian view of the good life is far from obvious.

In his book *Die Heilige Familie und ihre Folgen*, Albrecht Koschorke (2000) argues that the depiction of the Holy Family as an 'intimate community, full of tender turning towards the other' has a 'decisive share in the ... presence of an ideal of family intimacy in everyday life' in the Western world to the present day.[15] However, he also points out the remarkable character of this great influence, given the tendency towards hostility to family in the Gospels. Koschorke emphasises the apparently anomalous character of the Holy Family as a family with, for example, three paternal figures of both human (Joseph) and divine (God and Holy Spirit) character.[16] Koschorke does not explain the unexpected rise in the popularity of the Holy Family as a distinct topos in Christian art in terms of ideological programmes. He understands it as first of all a result of the creativity prompted by the central religious symbol of the incarnation as such. The incarnation as the union of the divine and the human is always characterised by restlessness (*Unruhe*). This union cannot be expressed, according to Koschorke, in definite concepts, but demands continuous reformulations. In a similar way, the Holy Family of the incarnate God contains an ambiguity: it creates an in-between space between the holy and the profane, between the divine and the human. This in-between character gives rise to a great variety in interpretations and appropriations (40–2).

This variety is visible in the tendencies towards a humanisation of God (*Vermenschlichung Gottes*), which range from the elevated representations of the late antiquity and Byzantine art to the corporality of Renaissance art. Koschorke describes this development as an increase in naturalness – that

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[14] Luke 14:26; compare also Mark 10:29–30.
[15] Albrecht Koschorke, *Die Heilige Familie und ihre Folgen* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2000), 20; compare also 38; translations are mine.
[16] Koschorke, *Die Heilige Familie*, 40. As a result of the competition between these paternal figures, Koschorke argues, the position of the father has never been taken up in a univocal way in Christianity – which seems rather amazing for a patriarchal religion. Nevertheless, the image of this Holy Family has been very influential in shaping the social codes of the Western world. Koschorke even relates this ambiguity of the father position to the suggested current crisis of fatherhood, which stands over against a rather stable relation between mother and child (216).

is, conformity to the human world.[17] It is paralleled by an understanding of Mary's motherhood as this-worldly (*Verdiesseitigung*). The latter view is part of the mediaeval turn to the figure of Mary as such and to a more emotional piety centred around the dramatic perception of Jesus' passion and death (45). In this context, new expressions of the relationship between Mary and Jesus arise such as the Mater dolorosa, the Stabat Mater and the Pieta (45–50). According to Koschorke, the biblical and theological basis for this kind of piety is very small. He characterises the motive of the 'grieving of the mother' as not genuinely Christian but rather stemming from 'pagan religiosity' (45). All these aspects of humanisation and this-worldliness are proof of an overcoming of the Christian tendency of hostility towards family. This hostility is, as we have just indicated, clearly present in the Gospels, but Koschorke points out that the opposite development is also depicted in the Gospels. Jesus started out as a rebel who freed himself from his family, his mother in particular, so that he could fulfil his heavenly duties. At the end of his life, however, only his mother and some other women stayed with him to mourn over him. His disciples, his new brothers and sisters, left him (45). The tradition of the Pieta from the fourteenth century onwards is in line with this failure to break free of the family, Koschorke argues. It does not show Christ the Redeemer or the rebel Jesus who challenges the order of the family. It highlights an attitude of resigned suffering and sacrifice in which the viewer may participate through identification with Mary's sorrows (48, 70).

Described in this brief way, this history of the rise of the artistic genre or topos of the Holy Family easily creates the impression of a story of the gradual domestication of the holy. That which in the figure of Jesus is potentially disturbing or even revolutionary for the given structures of society is lost in the course of time. In its institutionalisation and inter-twinement with the powers that be, religion loses its controversial and transformative character, its sharp edges. The appreciation of ordinary family life that becomes visible in the rise of devotion to the Holy Family may then be seen as part of this domesticating development. It results in a religious life that is more likely to sanctify the status quo and thus becomes less complex and varied. This interpretation is not where Koschorke's argument leads, however. He emphasises that the Holy Family is not simply the existing family; it contains too many conflicting

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[17] 'Gegründet auf das Dogma der Inkarnation, . . ., erscheint das Übernatürliche im Verhältnis zwischen Christus und der Madonna in einem immer natürlicheren, der Menschenwelt gemässeren Licht' (Koschorke, *Die Heilige Familie*, 43).

meanings that resist such domestication. Each of the three persons of the Holy Family is a 'non-standard' family member: the mother, the father and the son. Koschorke's book is partly ordered as explorations of the different combinatory forms (*Kombinatoriken*) that arise from the variety of roles and positions of the three persons and the relationships between them. For example, the divine origin of the human being Jesus is itself threefold in the form of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which means a kind of doubling of the Holy Family. Mary is a mother, but also a virgin and the divine bride who embodies the church. The range of meanings of the different persons is broad and increases exponentially in the relationships between them. As a result, the 'field of gravitation' of the Holy Family is one in which, according to Koschorke, all differences laid down in cultural kinship systems 'break apart' (73). Koschorke calls this phenomenon *Entdifferenzierung*, 'undifferentiation'. The usual differentiations of the nomenclature of kinship collapse: all kinds of relationships are possible, including those forbidden in profane life. This is not a problem for the believer, however, but is 'met with joy'. What is usually irreconcilable is now suddenly compatible and speech is intoxicated by these possibilities of new combinations.

Koschorke wonders how this unlimiting (*entgrenzend*) character relates to that of the Holy Family as a moral model which displays certain norms (78). He concludes that the two tendencies characterise the 'Janus-faced disposition' of religious symbols as such. On the one hand, religion is unlimiting: it transcends the existing norms, logics and identities and promises freedom. On the other hand, however, it also gives rise to inclusions and exclusions. It inaugurates differences and similarities and thus a new order (79). Thus, the Holy Family imagery on the one hand collects elements from ordinary family life but combines them in ways unthought and un-experienced. It prompts creativity by which new meanings come into existence. These have been very influential in shaping the social codes and moral ideals of the Western world.

Givenness beyond Glorification of the Ordinary or Domestication of the Sacred

We turned to the history of the artistic topos of the Holy Family in search of a deeper understanding and wider elaboration of Rembrandt's expression of the sacred in a realistic, everyday family scene. We associated Rembrandt's Kassel Holy Family with the topic of givenness first of all because life as given in its everyday character is taken seriously as suggesting something more, as revealing something beyond it, as expressing a surplus

of meaning. A closer look, especially at the presence of the painted frame and curtain, complicated this first association: the everyday scene as such is not enough to evoke the surplus of meaning. Moreover, the moral implications of the painting are unclear. These can range from a glorification of family life as good as such to a provocative profanation by a domestication of the holy. The morally problematic character of the first extreme is obvious, while the second leaves no room for transcendence. Is this problem not inherent in the topos as such of the Holy Family? These interpretive questions instigated an examination of its artistic history. The relatively late occurrence of this theme in art and its incongruity with the Gospels' tendency of hostility to family and with the non-standard Holy Family in the Gospels deepen the difficulties of relating the ordinary and the divine with an eye to morality. Koschorke's view of the topos of the Holy Family, however, leads beyond a simple interpretation of such relating as either glorification or domestication. Religious symbols like this give meaning by both 'unlimiting' existing distinctions and limiting or ordering life. They direct our attention to an aspect of reality by tilting it in unexpected ways. Thus, according to Koschorke, the image of the Holy Family has resulted in special attention to family life and an emphasis on its crucial role in the good life as well as a critique of it.

Koschorke's interpretation thus stimulates us to go beyond the options of viewing the Holy Family as either a glorification of the ordinary or a domestication of the sacred. The topos of the Holy Family as it developed in art did not simply imply a focus on family life as a good nor a doing away with the non-conventional views of family life in the New Testament. Koschorke observes in the symbol a kind of balancing between taking existing structures seriously and creatively opening up new meanings and therefore also criticising existing ones. This 'taking seriously' need not imply that family as such becomes good or sacrosanct. The balancing resonates with Marcel's view of family as mystery. This view takes family in its contingent, historical form seriously as a setting in which life is experienced in a deeper sense. That, however, is not to be equated with the sanctioning of the contingent or dominant forms of family life as good. Family as mystery means that people experience themselves here not merely as living beings, but as spirit – that is, as able to adopt an attitude towards life. Marcel characterises this attitude with terms like 'reverence', 'respect' and 'piety' towards life as a gift. How can we elaborate on this attitude in relation to the given character of family and its moral status? We noticed at the start of our investigation that family is difficult and controversial in ethics because its non-chosen character is not easily compatible

with our views of human moral actors as free, independent or autonomous. We conceived of family as confronting us with the non-chosen side of life, which stimulated an ethical reflection that holds together the moments of freedom and its 'other side', as we called it in Chapter 2. Rembrandt's Holy Family paintings and Koschorke's view of the Holy Family topos put us on the track of a balanced way of approaching the given character of family which takes seriously experiences of givenness without letting them ossify in the sanctioning of family life as good.

After these first evocations of the theme of family and givenness from Rembrandt, we now turn again to academic debates in which this theme is prominent, in both a constructive and a critical sense. Despite the critical questions raised, the idea that life as it presents itself shows that family is important is all but exceptional in ordinary thinking. A very common way of characterising family is to call it a natural, biological or genetic relationship. It is in this suggested naturalness that its difference from other kinds of relationships lies. The language of naturalness is found in recent family ethics as well. In general, ethicists seldom speak naively of naturalness because of its suggestion of an absolute normativity of what are in fact only contingent, cultural facts. We will turn to two recent examples of family ethics that nevertheless strike a blow for this view of family as natural. To continue our reflection on the feeling for the sacred in experiencing givenness, we will take into account both a consciously non-religious and a religious example: the philosopher Brenda Almond and the theologian Don Browning.[18] As became clear in Chapter 1, Browning is a prominent researcher in recent theological and ethical reflections on family. Almond is one of the very few philosophers who addresses the topic of family in general and does not limit it to rights and duties in relations between parents and children. We will investigate their views in detail to explore what their seemingly risky language of the natural might reveal regarding speaking meaningfully about givenness. Moreover, since these are recent views, they enable us to explore the suggested problematic status of givenness in our time that we discussed in Chapter 1. As these views are clearly motivated by concern about the well-being of the family, they also give us the opportunity to continue our analysis of the worrisome status of the topic of family in contemporary research. The sensitivity to the risks of

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[18] For an analysis of Almond and Browning in a different framework, see my article 'Dignity in the Family? Analyzing Our Ambiguous Relationship to the Family and Theological Suggestions toward Overcoming It', in *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family, and Violence*, Semeia Studies/Society of Biblical Literature, Vol. 72, ed. by L. Juliana Claassens and Klaas Spronk (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 169–88.

givenness and a first impression of an alternative understanding that we have acquired in our explorations of the theme of the Holy Family will be in our minds as we analyse these debates. We will return to Rembrandt in the conclusion to this chapter.

Givenness as Natural: Almond and Browning

Brenda Almond's interest in the natural character of family clearly stems from worries regarding the current state of the family. In her 2006 study of the family, Almond analyses the current state as one of fragmentation leading to a decrease of its significance with negative effects for all.[19] To counter this trend, a revaluation of the natural character of family is needed. By family, Almond means 'the chain of personal connections that gives meaning to our human notions of past, present and future – a mysterious genetic entity that binds us in our short span of individual existence to our ancestors and to our successors' (*The Fragmenting Family*, 1). Fragmentation then signifies the decrease in importance of these relationships that determine our view of ourselves as beings with a specific past and a connection to the future. The importance of the 'mysterious genetic bond' is no longer self-evident. Almond acknowledges that this development is not easy to understand. The qualification 'mysterious' indicates that there is not simply a 'genetic bond' at stake. The complexity of the issue is further reflected in her investigation of three, mutually reinforcing fields in which the fragmentation becomes visible.

Brenda Almond: The Fragmentation of the Family Explained by the Decline of Respect for the Natural

Almond starts her analysis with an extensive exploration of her own field of expertise, that of philosophical reflection and intellectual deliberation in general. Here she observes both a silence and a 'hatred for the family' (204), holding influences stemming from feminism, Marxism and deconstructionism particularly responsible for the latter. Briefly summarised, these ways of thinking view family as a vehicle of inequality. A second field that shows the fragmentation of the family is science and technology. Artificial reproductive technology creates a new kind of family relations. This is often presented as only serving the needs of families by enabling non-genetic parenthood. Almond challenges this account as one-sided (120). In

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[19] Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006).

her view, the conscious choice to create new life in a context of non-genetic relationships blurs the status of bonds between the child and its genitors. The importance, however, of these genetic bonds does not disappear all of a sudden now that it is possible to become pregnant with a non-genetically related child. The idea that children have a right to know their genetic ancestors is not far-fetched, according to Almond. A third field of the disintegration of the family is that of law and policymaking, which of course reflects the aforementioned developments. Almond speaks of a 'legal deconstruction of the family' (2) that is taking place. In law and policy, marriage is no longer privileged and family is defined in a functional or a sociolegal way instead of biologically. It has become easier to divorce. Almond cites plans for equalling any kind of close or intimate relationship to the legal status of family relations.[20] Such proposals are in keeping with the reality of non-genetic and newly composed families after divorce. Law has clearly incorporated the idea that relationships are less permanent and that people beyond the circle of genetic kin may claim family status.

Almond unfolds her critique of the fragmentation of the family in these three fields by first describing examples of it in a variety of societal and especially legal developments. Returning observations are that family relations vary across one's lifetime and are thus less permanent and stable. Of course, this lack of permanence is most prominent in couple relationships, but this affects all other family relations. The ideal of 'sexual exclusivity or faithfulness' (23) wanes with the decrease in viewing marriage as a permanent alliance. In her evaluation of these developments, Almond recognises the attraction of the alternative idea of freedom, choice and variety, but doubts whether people can live with such unclear and unstable situations which find their most extreme expression in open marriage (27–30). Central to the underpinning of her criticism are the consequences of this free choice for the most vulnerable family members, children.[21] They cannot choose for themselves but have to succumb to the whims of the adults. It is very difficult to give voice to and serve children's interests when parents disagree on their role and rights (127–40). Almond points out that the claim to serve their interests is easier made than proved.[22]

Apart from mapping out these factual changes in stability and reflecting on them critically, Almond also goes into the moral justifications that, in

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[20] Almond (*The Fragmenting Family*, 2, 202) refers to the 2001 Canadian report of the Law Commission of Canada, *Beyond Conjugality*.

[21] Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, chapter 7, pages 17, 55, 68, 101.

[22] Almond cites empirical research that has shown that if no abuse or violence is present, quarrelling parents are less of a problem for children than divorce (Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, 143–4).

her view, sustain them. A central sentiment in these justifications is
a concern for equality and against discrimination. This sentiment leads
to downplaying biological ties and advocating more room within the
sphere of the family for people who were not traditionally part of it. This
is a concern for equality not just between men and women, but also
between heterosexual and homosexual and other relationships, married
and unmarried couples, with or without children, as well as people who are
single and want to have children. According to Almond, taking same-sex
families into account has been particularly of great influence on this
equality thinking and the new laws and policies based on it. She analyses
it as an 'ambitious attempt to rewrite the concept of the family in its
entirety' (166–7). Her brief summary of the difference between this new
conception and the earlier ways of defining family is a lack of respect for the
natural character of the family.

The Importance of the Natural and the Vagueness of Its Underpinning

Almond's use of this terminology of the natural is not very precisely
defined, although it is the central thread in her critical analyses of the
different fields. She opens her first chapter with a section entitled 'What Is
Natural?' (11–15) and ends the book with one called 'The Attack on
Biology: Diminishing the Blood Tie'. She uses the terms 'biological' and
'genetic' as synonyms for 'natural' and sometimes refers to the 'blood tie'. If
one tries to get a more systematic picture of the use of this terminology
throughout the book, the most obvious meaning is related to reproduction:
the fact that new life comes into existence not from one human being alone
but only through the joint action of a man and a woman. In that sense we
may interpret her views of family as focussing on givenness, although this is
not her terminology. She uses the terms 'biological' or 'natural' first and
foremost in reference to this basis of family in reproduction (15). Pair
bonding is also explicitly referred to as a 'natural phenomenon', which,
Almond adds, is also present in other species (40).

Almond regards these biological facts as the original basis on which
kinship took shape in culture. It is the basis first of all for the high cultural
status ascribed to 'the physical connection of two persons of opposite sex'. In
many cultures, this was institutionalised in marriage as the context for
bearing and raising children (15). The commonality of marriage throughout
history and in different cultures, and blood relationship as 'the webbing
underpinning most-known cultures and societies' (96), are historical facts
that Almond often quotes as confirming the guiding character of the natural.

She also relates this central importance of the offspring-generating bond between man and woman to the idea that natural, innate aspirations are different for men and women. Over against feminist arguments in favour of a genderless family, she states that the natural inclinations of women to let the personal prevail over the political must be acknowledged.[23] It is not just in feminist circles that this guidance of the natural is lost, but much more broadly as well. The unity of sex, permanence in relationships and child raising, and their support by economic and legal structures (12) no longer exists. Sex is not necessary to generate offspring and is valued as such. People stay together as long as their relationship works. Moreover, new reproductive technologies have created other, artificial ways of having children. Almond, however, denies that it is possible to simply leave the importance of these biological facts behind and redefine family in a broader and less precise way. What has been the meaningful ground of a special relatedness for centuries – that is, that sex naturally implies the possibility of progeny and that both should take shape in a network of stable relationships – cannot simply be ignored. Science, in her view, also confirms the importance of the natural through the rise in knowledge of our genetic makeup (95–7). It underlines that kinship cannot be narrowed to the parent–child relationship, but implies a much wider network of connections.

That it is not problematic to favour this genetic network above other relationships and regard it as implying greater obligations is something Almond discusses in the final chapters. She introduces the issue of the ethical justification of the 'preference for your "own"' or 'partiality' (181). From an equality perspective, this idea is, of course, suspect due to its apparent egotistical or discriminating character. Almond suggests, however, that the family may show a third possibility (184) between the extremes of individualism and egalitarianism. To begin with, a preference for family members would not in principle rule out also 'putting out a hand to help a stranger' (185). More important is that, when applied to family, the partiality argument is paradoxical: the idea of favouring the particular group of the family would count for everyone and thus be a 'universal duty' (182). The difficulty lies in how to coexist in such a way that this is indeed possible for everyone (186). For this purpose, it is necessary to find and occupy 'some moral ground between concern for all and concern for oneself', and it is precisely in this in-between sphere that Almond locates family. She regards the given – that is, biological or

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[23] Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, 76–7, where she briefly refers to evolutionary psychology and also to Carol Gilligan's analyses.

natural – character of family as of central importance for this 'distinctive ethical status' (186). Precisely because of its natural givenness, family may, moreover, be an institution that cuts 'across political, economic and social hierarchies' (66). Thus, it remains 'the ultimate bulwark against depersonalized totalitarian regimes'. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that families can themselves be repressive.

As Almond gives little systematic account of what kind of terminology the language of the natural is and its current status, her few statements on it stand out quite strikingly. The first is a conclusion halfway through her book, at the end of the fifth chapter, on the consequences of new technology for having or not having children (reliable methods of contraception, safe abortion and in vitro fertilisation (IVF)). She states: 'The reasons for the importance given to the genetic link are complex, and may perhaps better be sought within the depths of the subconscious mind rather than in any reasoned judgement' (97). Remarkably, she characterises here the importance of a given, a scientific fact ('genetic link'), as one that cannot so much be rationally argued for but is rooted in the subconscious. As examples, she refers to the myths of the changeling and of Cinderella. Finally, she mentions the age-old 'doubts about paternity' that are at present augmented due to egg and embryo donation, which also lead to the possibility of unexpectedly being siblings. All this is the result of the fact that 'previously unified roles are now susceptible to division'. For Almond, the 'subconscious' or irrational character clearly does not mean that these feelings and experiences should not be taken seriously. The wish 'to know and to belong' is part of how at least some people form their identities and should therefore be taken into account in policy concerning donation and adoption (96).

Her chapter 6 concludes with a similar statement. In this chapter, Almond focusses entirely on these new reproductive technologies and their moral underpinning by reference to 'rights to reproduce' (99). In this context, she emphasises the rights of children that are easily lost to view. After discussing the questions of whether and how mothers and fathers matter with respect to raising children and the possible problems related to not knowing one's genetic parents, she concludes the chapter by emphasising once more the difficulty of the matter at hand. She qualifies this complexity by suggesting that it is not clear that these issues 'are open to the kind of reasoning that is standard in either science or the social sciences' (119) – science being the field she discusses in these two chapters. She continues: 'Perhaps indeed it will have to be accepted that argument cannot settle these matters, which are deeply intuitive. They bring into

question conceptions of family, social and legal conventions, and a judgment about the value of nature versus human artifice.' Subsequently, she again refers to people's interest in their genetic kin, their choice in assisted reproductive technology (ART) procedures for having genetically related children, and most people's favouring of 'security and reliable family relationships'. These examples support the importance of genetic relatedness that was until recently constitutive of family life.

These two brief meta-remarks thus combine two approaches and recall Almond's opening definition of the family as a 'mysterious genetic entity' that binds one to ancestors and successors. On the one hand, she regards family as founded on the given of natural facts, the understanding of which is deepened in modern times by science. On the other hand, she states that family is a mystery rooted in the 'subconscious' and 'deeply intuitive', which makes it a complex reality whose meaning and value cannot be determined easily by means of common, rational argument. The latter qualifications resonate with our attention to the difficulty of naming what family might mean. In particular, she highlights the importance of the genetic link as difficult to account for in rational arguments. Almond is thus not unaware of this unnameability of what family might mean and displays a sense of mystery. This awareness, however, is not in keeping with her use of the terminology of the natural with its strong connotations of factuality and science. Thus, a tension arises which may again be interpreted as a moment of a meaningful impasse. The two word fields of mysteriousness and naturalness are apparently both needed to indicate the specific character of family, but they are incongruent.

What is more, Almond does not notice any tension between calling family a 'mystery' and at the same time 'natural'. Perhaps this is because the language of the natural predominates in her reasoning and along with it the connotations of factuality and realism. On the other hand, right at the beginning of her book, she already signals that biology cannot be claimed as the 'ethical foundation of the family' (9). Almond indicates this with the classic phrase that it is problematic to reason 'from what *is* to what ought to be' (14). Instead, she argues that she uses the biological observations in a more modest way, only as the 'most plausible' or 'reasonable' starting point (9) for understanding family. The 'facts of nature' indicate what 'human life at its best could be' and thus guide judgement about what is good (14). Nevertheless, she indeed speaks of *facts* in this context and qualifies them further by opposing them to 'doctrinal teaching or authority'. The latter is, in her view, not necessary to give the natural its moral weight. For this way of dealing with nature as the reasonable starting point

of understanding family, Almond claims the label of the philosophical tradition of 'natural-law' thinking (13–15). This does not result, however, in a continuous discussion of this tradition in her book. While she acknowledges that the natural-law tradition has been largely elaborated in a religious framework, she herself wants to interpret it 'in a way that avoids the need to appeal to religious doctrines that can be accepted as a guide only by adherents' (15) and often 'brings contention' (207). Almond describes the non-religious and therefore 'wider appeal' of the natural-law tradition she aims for as 'an understanding of sexual morality that is based on serious reflection about what is most fulfilling for human beings at successive ages and stages of life, taking into account their emotional needs and lifetime goals' (15).

This aim of 'serious reflection' on the specific needs during the human life course, again, does not sound like acknowledging the 'subconscious', 'intuition' or family as mystery, but as realistic and fact-based. However, the actual character of her book is not a meticulous analysis of different life stages and their implications for how family must be understood, just like it is not a detailed natural-law argument in favour of family. Almond's style and analyses are essayistic rather than sharp, analytic or knock-down arguments. Thus, using quasi-factual terminology, Almond tries to express and support something which she also characterises as a mystery with which reason cannot easily come to grips. She does not account for her choice for the language of the natural or ponder its possibly problematic sides. She uses it as if it were obvious.[24] This suggested obviousness seems to rest on the aura of factuality, realism and scientificity of the language of the natural. Her use also shows that it is indeed an 'aura': the language of the natural as she uses it is not precise or scientific in the sense of well-defined, obvious or based on verifiable facts. This language of the natural is thus Almond's way of speaking about aspects of reality that should be taken into account as given. It refers to something obvious that is rooted in how things go in nature in general, but this claim is not proven.

Problems of the Language of the Natural as Claiming Obviousness

Our reflections on the Holy Family and Rembrandt's realistic depiction of it confronted us with the dangers of a strong notion of the givenness of family. They relate to the more general risks of presenting family as an

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[24] Compare Almond, *The Fragmenting Family*, 9: 'For many people, the most plausible starting point for any analysis [of family] is biological.'

unalterable sphere that precedes choice and human arrangement. What are in fact contingent forms are presented as given normative structures. Thus, dominant forms of life are easily endorsed while minority forms are excluded. Almond clearly regards the intact heterosexual family with its biological offspring as normative. In her argument, this does not imply, however, a condemnation of all other forms of family life. She acknowledges that the emancipation of women and new forms of family life have resulted in a lot of good. She also argues that the coming into existence of a more diverse family life does not mean that the more traditional forms are no longer of value. She tries to evoke the ethical weight of these traditional forms by pointing out their 'natural' character. Although Almond does not end up taking a straightforwardly conservative approach, her language can be easily misused to deny certain groups the label of family and its corresponding rights. It is, for example, quite common to condemn homosexual relations as 'unnatural', implying that these are not true relationships equal to that between a man and a woman.

This is not, however, where the central difficulty of this approach lies. A greater problem is that this way of calling family natural or based on biological facts – that is, on reproduction and genetic relatedness – turns out to be language that ends rather than gives rise to thought and moral reflection in particular. It is a way of speaking that does not seem to need further clarification. Referring to what is natural turns out to be a claim of obviousness. Also, the importance of what is given 'by nature' does not seem to need justification. Thus, this language does not invite further reflection on what the natural character of relationships implies and what is so special or worthy of protection in this. The importance of the natural is presupposed, but is not argued for separately. Why precisely is the 'natural fact' of having sex with its implied possibility of procreation so important for a relationship? Why permanence? Moreover, the explanatory force of analysing our time and changing family life in terms of a decreasing respect for naturalness can be questioned. Family relationships are becoming less stable and more diverse. Why is this the case? Is this a sign that people no longer take 'nature' seriously? Where does this longing to free oneself from nature come from? This question arises especially when, paradoxically, the quality of naturalness also has a high status because of its aura of factuality and scientificity or, as in the sphere of reproduction technology, other, more sentient suggestions. The fact that these kinds of questions are not dealt with in Almond's book can be explained as the result of the aura of facticity and obviousness of the language of the natural: it does not seem to need any explanation.

In the overview of recent family research in Chapter 1, we noticed that its focus is not primarily the question of what family might mean. It rather tends to presuppose certain meanings as obvious and subsequently also self-evidently starts from a positive or negative evaluation of them. What family means is supposed to be clear both for advocates and opponents. Almond is clearly an advocate of family as a good, but that does not lead to explorations of this meaning and the good. The dominant characterisation of family as natural contributes to the impression of obviousness. One need only think of nature to understand what a family is and why it is important. Any further underpinning is unnecessary. In Almond, we observe as well that this is part of an approach that consists primarily in taking a position on current family developments – here a negative one. It does not give rise to further thought on how precisely permanent, non-chosen relationships can or should take shape at present, given their apparent lack of obviousness. Neither do the references to the natural create room to reflect on the 'mysterious' character of the family bond or its basis in the unconscious and in intuition, aspects Almond herself mentions. These aspects also ask that attention be paid to the given character of family. They imply questions rather than conclusions, however, and therefore do not match the language of the natural. Nonetheless, precisely because of this questioning character, they can stimulate moral reflection, also regarding the aspect of givenness. Almond draws particular attention to givenness in the sense of facts. Family should be acknowledged more as a fact of life. This approach does not aim to shed light on or make us aware of the moments in which this givenness can be concretely experienced and what its moral implications might be. The latter are narrowed down to a sticking to the so-called biological ties. If Almond had elaborated on the aspects of complexity and mysteriousness she mentioned, a different approach to family as given would have developed, one that would have stimulated moral reflection in exploring what this givenness might imply for our acting. This question is of course particularly burning in the case of problematic family situations. It is also important, however, to provide an alternative to a one-sided focus on equality which dominates in current views of family, according to Almond.

Almond explicitly renounces thinking in terms of religious natural law, without elaborating on her reasons. What happens when, contrary to Almond, this religious character is not excluded? Might a theological argument in favour of respecting the natural change the meanings of this naturalness? Could religious meanings be compatible with the scientific connotation of the language of the natural that is dominant in our time? Might a theological approach create room to take into account family as

mystery precisely as regards the aspect of givenness, because of its feeling for the sacred? With these additional questions, we will look at Don Browning as a recent example of a theological view of family as given.

Don Browning: The Natural Character of Family as Shown in Science and Christian Belief

Browning is famous for his various big interdisciplinary family studies projects from 1990 until his death in 2010, which brought together dozens of scholars and led to an enormous amount of publications.[25] Browning presents this practical theological research as originating in the quest for an 'alternative liberal and critical Christian theology of families to counter the dominant perspective proffered by the American religious right'. The project was soon reformulated more openly as describing and explaining the recent 'rapid changes' in family life and providing a Christian response to them (*Equality and the Family*, 38). The changes are the well-known developments we mentioned in Chapter 1, summed up as 'more divorce, more childbirth outside of marriage, more non-marriage, more cohabitation' (38). Browning's research is, like Almond's, a clear specimen of the worried branch of family research. The changes are identified as elements of which 'Christianity throughout its history has been skeptical' (39). In Browning, the worries are specified further by taking into account sociological analyses of modern time as one of the colonisation of the intimate world of the family and other smaller communities by that of the 'technical rationality of the systems world'.[26] Moreover, Browning's studies gradually focussed on the

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[25] For an overview of Browning's work and the central project 'Religion, Culture, and Family', see, for example, his articles 'Empirical Considerations in Religious Praxis and Reflection', in Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 31–49, and 'Introduction: the Equal-Regard Family in Context' (in *The Equal-Regard Family and Its Friendly Critics: Don Browning and the Practical Theological Ethics of the Family*, ed. by John Witte Jr., M. Christian Green and Amy Wheeler (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–16). The large overlap in Browning's texts makes the following references rather arbitrary. We do not cite more than three texts for a similar statement. To indicate that similar statements may also be found elsewhere, we use 'e.g.'. We will focus on the 2007 book *Equality and the Family* and the 2006 overview article 'World Family Trends' mentioned in note 27.

[26] *Equality and the Family*, 39–41. Browning speaks of the Weberian–Habermasian theory of colonisation and specifically refers to Robert Bellah as thinking through the thesis in relation to family. Compare also Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 84–100, 117, 247–9; Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 5–6, where he defines technical rationality as 'the belief that the efficient use of powerful technical means in the form of either business procedures or government bureaucracies can increase our individual and collective satisfaction'.

role of the church in dealing with the changes in family life, both internally and in her public expressions (41).

The public character of the research is greatly emphasised also in methodological accounts. It is related to its being radically practice-oriented, in line with what is called the 'turn to "practical philosophy"'(6), also in its dealing with (religious) tradition. Moreover, the public character parallels the aim to write for the 'social and cultural person on the street' rather than just for the academia (35). Finally, aiming for public research means being 'critical' in the sense of not solely depending on the confessional starting point. The research should 'stand up in the give and take of public discourse' and 'give reasons that have broader public intelligibility'.[27] To this end, Browning combines what he regards as central elements from the Christian tradition and from recent scientific theories on family. In this combinatory project, the language of the 'natural' and 'biological' figures prominently, both in the theological views and in those taken from other academic disciplines.

Like Almond, Browning summarises recent changes in family life as a decline of the intact biological family.[28] Social scientific research has by now shown 'definitively', according to Browning, that being raised outside of biological two-parent families affects children's chances negatively.[29] He specifies this by locating the heart of the problem in the decline of the involvement of the father in family life, which he labels 'the male problematic' (e.g., Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 115). Worldwide, women

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[27] Don S. Browning, 'World Family Trends', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. by Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243–60, at 250–1 (apart from the sections on 'political culture', largely the same as 'Practical Theology and the American Family Debate' from 1997 (*Equality and the Family*, chapter 7, pages 103–30); the following references are to the 2006 article). Elsewhere (e.g., Browning, *Equality and the Family*, chapter 12, pages 254–7), Browning also uses the term 'critical' to indicate that his theory of 'familism' is critical of the current worrisome developments and proposes a marriage culture that favours the intact biological family guided by the critical principle of 'equal regard'. Equal regard means, briefly, that all family members are respected as of equal value. They should all be enabled to develop themselves fully (405). Children should be educated to later build 'equal regard' relationships by themselves. All adults are seen as equally responsible for their family life. Moreover, family members should respect and support one another in caring for their relatives (Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon and Robert M. Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 303–4). Good, empathetic communication is crucial for this 'equal regard'.

[28] Browning clarifies that 'intact' does not necessarily mean a focus on the nuclear family as an entity on its own, isolated from the extended family and other social networks (*Equality and the Family*, 351).

[29] Browning, 'World Family Trends', 244, which refers to Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1–12. See also Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 113.

and children are the victims of this tendency and, in the end, men themselves are as well. It leads to a global trend of the feminisation of poverty and kinship.[30] The central aim of Browning's research is therefore to contribute to the support of the intact biological family by stimulating the involvement of the father. To this end, he draws on results from different scientific disciplines which, in his view, reinforce each other. Depending on the context, Browning advances one or the other disciplinary approach to underpin his statements.

Apart from social scientific data that show the bad effects of disintegrated families, a very prominent place is assigned to proof from evolutionary sciences. It is here that the terminology of the 'natural' or 'biological' flourishes. It is used to indicate certain original tendencies of the human species, also in comparison to other mammals. Among the evolutionary theories, Browning prefers what he calls 'evolutionary psychology'. This is, in Browning's words, 'a relatively new discipline that uses the concepts of evolutionary theory to order the facts of human psychology'.[31] Browning prefers this among the evolutionary disciplines as it is the 'least deterministic' and 'the most open to understanding how cultural patterns influence our evolved biological tendencies'. This evolutionary view confirms 'why children of intact biological parents seem, on average, to do better' (*Equality and the Family*, 121) and helps in particular to come to grips with the male problematic. Browning first of all highlights the evolutionary views on the exceptionality of human family behaviour: 'Humans are one of the very few mammals in which males have become a relatively stable part of the nurturing of their children' ('World Family Trends', 251). Browning refers to W. D. Hamilton's theory of 'inclusive fitness' and 'kin altruism' from the 1960s and 1970s to better understand why both parents are so invested in the raising of their biological offspring, more than other people.[32] Browning summarises the relevant part of Hamilton's theory as that 'individuals are concerned not only with the survival of their own specific genes', but also with a broader group of family members, 'those who carry their genes' (252). The exceptional involvement of human males in the raising of their children is, according to Browning,

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[30] Browning, *Equality and the Family*, passim, for example, chapter 3, especially 52–5.

[31] Browning, *Marriage and Modernization*, 106. See also 'World Family Trends', 251; *Equality and the Family*, 120–1. Browning uses evolutionary ecology as a synonym of evolutionary psychology (e.g., *Equality and the Family*, 157–61).

[32] For example, Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 73, 119–20, 137–8, 154–93, 205, 335; 'World Family Trends', 252. Browning's use of evolutionary thinking predates his big family projects; compare, for example, Don S. Browning and Bernie Lyon, 'Sociobiology and Ethical Reflection', *Theology Today* 36/2 (1979): 229–38.

furthermore better understood by taking into account Hamilton's inventory of conditions for this involvement ('World Family Trends', 252; *Equality and the Family*, 121). First is fatherly acknowledgement of a child as his own; second is the high investment needed to cover the relatively long period of human infant dependence; third is the fact that the parents continue their sexual contact after reproduction; and fourth is the 'reciprocal altruism' or 'mutual helpfulness' between the genitors.[33] These conditions contributed to the male integration into family life 'thousands of years ago' ('World Family Trends', 252).

Unlike Almond, Browning gives much more attention to the ethical status of these insights from evolutionary thinking. He usually categorises them with the social scientific data as showing 'pre-moral goods'. Such goods are as such not 'directly moral' (*Equality and the Family*, 401) and thus not enough to realise correct moral behaviour, but they do indicate a direction towards it. Therefore, a pre-moral good 'is not to be absolutised but held as an important relative good to be encouraged'.[34] The moral weight of what is given is thus first of all elaborated in terms of acknowledging the specific character of how family life developed in the course of the evolution.

Remarkably, however, taking into account this proof from evolutionary thinking as a pre-moral good is presented as compatible with a theological approach. It enables a 'reconstructing' of Catholic natural-law theory on family as well as of Protestant views of the 'orders of creation'.[35] In the case of natural-law theory, Browning undertakes this reconstruction by turning to the thirteenth-century family theory of Thomas Aquinas, which draws on many ideas of Aristotle.[36] According to Browning, Aquinas' thoughts are 'strangely close and yet quite far' from the insights found in

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[33] In his references to the findings of evolutionary ecology, Browning highlights three related concepts from this evolutionary approach as relevant: inclusive fitness, kin altruism and parental investment (*Equality and the Family*, 157–61). The parental investment of males grew as human beings became hunter-gatherers: a 'dad-strategy' came into existence (159–60). The conditions for this transition are now limited to the three of long childhood dependence, paternal certainty about offspring and 'male helpfulness to a female in order to gain sex' (160).

[34] Browning, 'World Family Trends', 246. Pre-moral goods are one of the five dimensions of the 'thick morality' Browning identified in his earlier methodological work on practical theology and ethics. The other dimensions are narratives and metaphors, moral principles, sociological, economic and ecological views of action and specific practices related to roles and situations. This theory of the five dimensions of practical moral reason stems from Browning's *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1991, in particular 139–70). See also, for example, *Equality and the Family*, 29, 401–2.

[35] For example, Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 120, 125; 'World Family Trends', 255–7.

[36] Browning often quotes a passage from Aquinas on the necessity of the support of both parents to raise human children, which is different from other animals (*Summa Theologica*, q 41.a.1; for

evolutionary theory (*Equality and the Family*, 161). Browning illustrates this closeness by pointing out that Aquinas also acknowledged the problem of male involvement in the family and discussed it in relation to different involvement strategies among other animals. Like evolutionary thinkers, Aquinas realised the crucial issue of long childhood dependence among humans and noted the importance of paternal certainty about offspring for monogamous relations (162). Both contribute in his view to parental investment (164). Moreover, Aquinas regards sexuality as 'integrating marital partners' ('World Family Trends', 253). Thus, all four conditions discovered in present-day evolutionary thinking have their parallel in Aquinas. This elaboration of the 'naturalistic moment' (256) is, according to Browning, precisely what is needed to reconstruct a parallel notion in Protestant theology: that of God-given orders of creation which include family alongside state, church and labour. As this theory is often formulated in purely confessional terms and is thus only 'binding on the inner life of churches', it should be complemented to make it suitable for arguing in the 'public square' (255). In evolutionary theory and natural law, such additional reasons can be found.

Browning describes the methodological place of the insights into nature as follows: 'The naturalism recommended here is not a scientistic one that wipes tradition away and builds an ethic on the basis of the accumulation of discrete natural facts. The naturalism advocated here uses insights gained from the relatively distantiated epistemology of the social and evolutionary sciences to add a dimension of realism to the attestations of faith' (256). The realism enables the aforementioned public speaking of religion. Browning emphasises, however, that the ethical religious view cannot be reduced to this naturalism or simply be erected on its basis. What, then, are the specific 'attestations of faith', apart from the aforementioned general Christian scepticism towards the fragmenting family and the theories of natural law and the divine orders of creation? Browning focusses on two aspects, which he relates primarily to Aquinas and the New Testament. First of all, Aquinas points out the sacramental character of marriage, by which he means that it is 'reinforced with the grace of God which flows from Christ's love for the church' (254). This love of Christ further specifies the general notion of divine grace infused through marriage. A passage from the New Testament letter to the Ephesians in particular forms the basis of this specification. In Ephesians 5:21–33, an

example, *Equality and the Family*, 162, 198), but he also refers to similar passages in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (e.g., Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 163).

analogy is drawn between this love of Christ and that of the husband for his wife. The core element of this love is its self-sacrificial character: the husband must imitate Christ's love for the church in his commitment to his family and in sacrificing himself in his love for his family and his wife (e.g., *Equality and the Family*, 170, 184). Browning views this love as part of the 'equal regard' approach that characterises New Testament thinking. In comparison with the surrounding honour–shame culture, New Testament views of the roles of man and woman are in principle much more equal – although Browning states that this is 'not enough' for modern eyes (e.g., 181–6). Patriarchal elements are still present, also in Thomas, mainly from his Aristotelian inheritance. Nevertheless, the early Christian view really meant a revolution as regards the status of women. When embedded in the ideal of this broader New Testament norm of equal regard, self-sacrificial love also stays clear of becoming an end in itself – a danger which feminists in particular have pointed out (e.g., 187).

Browning also describes the methodological status of these specifically religious views in his family ethics. In his view, the function in general of religious symbols or narratives is that of 'stabilizing and deepening' natural inclinations and 'giving them a more permanent ethical form', which really means a 'transformation' ('World Family Trends', 254). Browning argues that biology 'informs' the meaning of the symbol, but does not 'dominate the final transformative work of the symbol and its surrounding narrative' (*Equality and the Family*, 195). What the sciences formulate on the basis of empirical evidence, religion and culture express in symbolic ways. Both approaches are necessary, according to Browning, as is clear from the fact that he describes both as reinforcing the other. This does not mean that he uncritically accepts all natural inclinations or all religious views. The criterion of 'equal regard' is presented as overruling. Browning claims it as biblical but also acknowledges modern influences in it. Moreover, the religious symbols are regarded as more 'mature' in comparison to the 'immature' natural inclinations (e.g., 201). If, in particular, men just follow their natural inclinations, this may lead them to a 'sexual strategy' away from their families. In this respect, the religious symbols do not just reinforce but also transform nature by favouring the commitment to family in permanent marriage and self-sacrificial love (172). Browning does not elaborate on the specifically religious character of this transformation, however. Instead, he often translates the religious views by common-sense statements like: 'no married relationship can survive over the long term without the husband and the wife possessing some capacity for self-sacrifice' (189).

The Compatibility of Religious Insights with Scientific Facts

The reason for our turning to Browning's language of the natural family was its religious character. Time and again, he states that the natural 'as such' cannot suffice as a basis for ethics. Browning aims for a distinctly theological contribution. Where does this become visible? He seems to start creating room for theological meanings by paying attention to the ethical status of the natural. In comparison to Almond, he pays more attention to this status. On the other hand, in the end, Browning's argument does not differ fundamentally from Almond's. He also argues on the basis of scientific views in favour of living in an intact family consisting of father, mother and their genetic offspring, although he focusses on the lack of involvement of the father in family life. Central in his view of family is thus that parents should stay together and men should do their share in family life in conformity with the principle of equal regard. Subsequently, the specific character of the religious view lies in the symbolic way of expressing these insights that Browning first of all takes from scientific views. They 'stabilize and deepen' them. The choice of precisely this view of the family as a good one is underpinned solely by proof that 'it works': the well-being of the family and thus of the husband, child and wife is served by this way of living. Empirical research is quoted as showing that, on average, families do better when they are kept intact, and evolutionary sciences are cited as pointing out that this shape of the family has the best chance of survival. The 'transformation' of the natural that the symbolic religious expressions of family are suggested to perform, especially in lasting marriage and self-sacrificial love, is not elaborated on with regard to its religious character. Browning's struggle to make theology more 'realistic' and 'practical' thus clearly dominates: his conclusions are put in general and common-sense, rather than emphatically religious, language. Attention to the difficulty of naming what family might mean, in particular in relation to a sacred dimension, or an awareness of its mystery character is absent. In Almond, we observed a tension between the language of the natural and the sparse remarks that display sensitivity to family as mystery. In Browning, a kind of tension can be seen between religious language of sacrament and self-sacrificial love on the one hand and naturalness on the other, but the dominance of the latter is even more emphatic. A real tension, let alone an impasse, does not arise.

Again, as in Almond, we can thus see how the language of the natural first of all invokes the authority of the sciences. In Browning, this authority is clearly visible in his project of making theology critical and public – that

is, comprehensible also to the 'person in the street'. To that end, the 'attestations of faith' need 'a dimension of realism'. This domination of the 'naturalist' and common-sense language need not surprise us: the aim of being 'realistic' seems entirely in conformity with the current high status of the fact- and evidence-based approaches we have already discovered in Almond. Nevertheless, it is surprising, given the provisos against a purely naturalistic ethics on which Browning also insists more explicitly than Almond. However, Browning does not elaborate on the precise consequences of such a naturalist ethics or on the dangers of thinking in terms of the natural. The framework of his debate is rather to find the right balance between scientific insights and those from religious sources. He aims to do justice to both. He regards taking the facts into account an improvement in theological views of family.

The Robust Claim of Naturalness Does Not Give Rise to Moral Reflection on Givenness

What do these two examples of using the language of the natural reveal as regards the possibilities of speaking meaningfully about givenness? In both examples, the language of the natural functions in three ways which sometimes overlap. The first becomes visible in the central claim that the intact two-parent family in which parents take care of their biological, non-adult offspring is the natural standard model of the nuclear family. Why this particular family form can be said to be natural is not shown, as we have seen. We only found references to the natural fact that a woman and a man are necessarily involved in creating offspring. Apart from that, Almond points to pair bonding as natural and Browning to the integration of fathers in caring for their offspring. The term 'natural', then, indicates that they see this feature in nature, among other animals who also have pair bonding, or as the outcome of a natural – that is, evolutionary – process of specifically human development. 'Natural' thus seems to mean first of all that something is an undeniable fact of the human makeup: without it human beings cannot survive. In a secondary sense, it is called 'natural' to regard one's biological parents as important, as constitutive of one's identity, even if parents and children have not lived together. The language of the natural thus allows these authors to assign a central place to reproduction and thus to biological relations in their reflection on what family might mean. Givenness is here expressed by pointing to facts laid bare by biology. This factual connotation does not facilitate a reflection on the moral question of why these facts should be so important in

determining the best form of family life. Such deliberation seems all the more necessary given the starting point of the reflections by Almond and Browning – that is, the observation that, at present, givenness in the sense of the natural is no longer respected. It remains unclear why they think they can nevertheless count on the power of the language of naturalness to express the morally binding character of the intact two-parent family.

Second, the language of the natural is self-evidently used as morally relevant. What is natural matters for determining what is good. Although the precise character of this relationship is a notoriously difficult question in ethics, these authors do not feel urged to account for it in a detailed way. We find references to natural-law theory in both. Browning even states he aims to reassess the importance of premodern natural-law thinking and the Protestant doctrine of the 'orders of creation'. An elaborate philosophical or theological theory of the morally binding character of nature is not found in either of these authors, however. Instead, they step outside their own disciplines and argue in favour of the biologically related family by referring to empirical research. In particular, research is quoted that measures people's well-being or psychological health, like in psychological investigations, including ones with an evolutionary perspective. They confirm that the so-called natural family model is most effective. As a result of these references to other disciplines, however, a different meaning of the natural comes into view in which effectiveness and efficiency become central. What is natural is what is proven to work best – that is, what provides the best chances of well-being for the greatest number of people. The natural is thus also good. This is a much more utilitarian model of arguing, while a natural law approach is more deontological. The authors themselves do not account for their views in terms of such a moral theory.

It is not surprising that this taking into account of the proven effects is preferred to a basis in absolute rules. This is in line with the orientation to 'facts' that can be perceived in general in Western societies, in particular in policy. However, calling the most effective model 'natural' does make a stronger claim than the rather modest claim that this model turns out to 'work best', given the current circumstances. Naturalness refers to ideas of a universal human makeup or design. This stronger claim should be accounted for. Otherwise, the claim is vulnerable to results from empirical studies that are opposed to it.[37] For example, what if evolutionary studies

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[37] Compare our remarks on the role of social science data in ethical reflection on parenthood in Chapter 1.

show that children could be just as well raised in a larger group and have different 'parents' apart from their biological parents? This argument is commonly used in public debate to support the role of institutionalised day care. Or what if psychological research shows healthy relationships are constituted by lasting physical attraction between the partners instead of permanence based on their being the genitors of the same children? It would be hard to cope with such objections with the vague notion of the natural found in Almond and Browning. They use the term 'natural' as an expression of what works best and regard this as an important foundation of their view of what is good. Givenness thus acquires the meaning of what is scientifically proven to be the best possible family model. This turn to empirical sciences to underpin the natural confirms that, at least at present, this language does not stimulate moral reflection but leads away from it. Consequently, the crucial question of whether 'what works best' is also what is good does not arise.

A third way in which the language of the natural figures in Almond and Browning is in line with common parlance. The vagueness of the language as well as the lack of any accounting for its use are in line with how people usually speak of the natural. In that everyday language, 'natural' refers to things that are expected and obvious. Concluding that something is natural means that it simply is the case and no further explanation is necessary. This often implies a contrast to what is the object of human hopes or plans, or a result of human choices and acting.[38]

That the language of the natural highlights the obvious character of the family is not completely unrelated to what we have indicated from the start as the difficulty of naming what family might mean. Part of the latter is that usually it is not made explicit what family means; meanings are experienced as self-evident and give strong impulses for acting. People know what family means. It indeed needs no explanation. Claiming naturalness may be regarded as a way of expressing this obviousness. However, the analysis of Almond and Browning has revealed that calling something 'natural' gives a specific, robust connotation to acknowledging its self-evidence or obviousness: it suggests being factual, scientifically proven. This robustness does not correspond to the sensitivity to the difficulty of naming what family might mean. As such, it is the reverse of our approach to family as mystery. The terminology of the natural opposes critical questions or

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[38] For example, one of the nine definitions of the *Collin's Cobuild Dictionary* says: 'Natural things exist or occur in nature and are not made or caused by people.' www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/natural.

further inquiry by claiming to be 'nothing but factual'. The claim of being fact-based is, moreover, dominant in that it excludes the value of other arguments, as we saw in two moments of a kind of tension in their reasoning. The religious symbols were introduced as more than a deepening confirmation of the natural in Browning, but could not be elaborated because of his focus on their 'realistic' character. In Almond, we found unelaborated references to mystery, intuition and the unconscious. The lack of room for this mystery character goes with a lack of stimulating moral reflection. The focus of this research is on the problem of family decline, and the language of the natural is used to counteract this and achieve a new obviousness. The difficulty of making sense of the given side of life, especially in our time, is not explored. The language of the natural suggests that it is still self-evident to regard the family as given, if only one remembers how well this givenness works out in real life. Thus, the interpretation as 'natural' does not invite further explorations of what family might mean or discussion on the moral weight of its givenness. Its meaning and goodness are obvious. The kind of balancing approach to givenness that we traced in the paintings of the Holy Family is not found here. Although Almond and Browning are clearly critical of recent trends in family life, their understanding in terms of naturalness does not stimulate an awareness of the experiences of givenness and a creativity in dealing with it. For them, an intact family is the best way to live with givenness.

Recent Anthropology's View of Kinship as Made

Almond and Browning perceive a widespread suspicion against family as something given. In their view, flexibility and lack of permanence threaten the existence and well-being of the family. We now step outside the context of the ethical debates to further explore this suggested tendency in a different discipline. In Chapter 1, we analysed sociological accounts of family decline and their historical critics. We briefly referred to similar critiques in social anthropology. The latter are particularly relevant to our theme of givenness because they are precisely opposite to the ones found in Almond and Browning. Recent kinship anthropologists argue against a view of Western family life as declining in modernity by pointing out that family has never been something natural or given. The so-called undeniable fact of reproduction is anything but the universal basis of kinship. Kinship is everywhere a cultural construct and therefore made, not given. An analysis of these anthropological views may therefore provide insight into what happens when the language of the natural is consciously

avoided in understanding family. Does this mean that attentiveness to what we have indicated as experiences of givenness is completely lost? If so, what does this imply for understanding what family might mean? Are meanings clearly defined as cultural constructs for each society? Or is our awareness of the difficulty of naming what family might mean, an awareness of the nature of family as mystery, also recognised in anthropological accounts? As emphatic opponents of the idea that family should be understood as a given, these anthropological views also enable us to gain a deeper insight into why givenness as embodied in family is so problematic for our time.

The Turn from Nature and Givenness in Recent Kinship Anthropology

In recent anthropological studies of kinship, it is hard to miss a complicated relationship to the understanding of family as given and, in particular, as natural or biological. Central to the self-understanding of the discipline is the narrative of a recent liberation from the old paradigms that regarded kinship as primarily given by nature. In line with the views of Almond and Browning, 'natural' or 'biological' here refers to the idea that, among human beings of all cultures, kinship relations are established first of all simply by procreation, by being born of two parents. Kinship relations are those between the child and its so-called biological genitors, and through them with a larger community connected by so-called blood ties. The language of the natural emphasises the givenness of family relations in the sense of being first of all an obvious, unalterable and universal fact of human life. The aim of anthropology in the old paradigm is presented as comparing the different ways cultures subsequently shape this primary givenness. Since the 1980s, however, this view has been criticised as the product of biased Western ways of thinking. Only Euro-Americans are said to understand themselves as defined first of all by their natural or biological makeup.

A recent survey article on the study of kinship entitled 'Transforming Kinship' by Sarah Franklin is illustrative of the prominence of the notion of a transformation in the view of kinship beyond biologistic views.[39] Franklin speaks of the former 'naturalised biogenetic idiom' that regarded

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[39] Sarah Franklin, 'Transforming Kinship', *eLS* 15 November (2013): 1–4, https://doi.org/10.1002/97 80470015902.a0005222.pub2. Franklin's highly appreciated interdisciplinary research focusses on the social aspects of the introduction of new reproductive technologies since the 1980s and the understandings of the biological to which they give rise. For example, Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, eds., *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke

kinship as 'rooted in a prior domain of naturalised reproductive biology' ('Transforming Kinship', 3). The current view is formulated in explicit opposition to this 'biogenetic idiom'. It defines kinship as 'an actively negotiated process of continuous, and often strategic, recomposition out of varied elements rather than a pattern of predictable compliance with a received normative, or "given", social structure' (4). This view is presented as the outcome of not only a process of self-critical reflection within kinship studies, but also of actual changes in how people live as families in Western industrialised societies in general (1–2). The post-war nuclear family diversified as a result of the well-known changes in marriage, adoption and homosexual and other relationships. Moreover, new reproductive technologies made it possible for couples to achieve, as Franklin formulates it, 'technologically the form of biological parenthood that had previously been presumed as natural' (1). This concise formulation confirms the picture of a major change: from kinship 'presumed as natural' to kinship 'technologically achieved'. The latter is further explained as a 'cultural activity', 'chosen', 'made' (2) and 'built' (3). As such, it is comparable to the conscious kinning that takes place in new forms of transnational adoption. This major change leads to a 'general pattern . . . of increasingly hybrid kinship strategies' in how people live their kinship life (3). New varieties are not without connection to older views, however, as reflected in Franklin's idea of 'continuous recomposition out of varied elements'. For example, traditional models of kin connection influence the views of the new kinship technology and vice versa (4). This recomposition is, moreover, presented as an 'active process' and opposed to what sounds like a much more passive 'pattern of predictable compliance with a . . . given structure'. These formulations clearly favour the language of the 'made' above that of the 'given'.

On the one hand, Franklin clearly emphasises the major change in anthropology towards a model of kinship as a 'social technology', a 'social process through which valued identities and relationships are . . . "cultured"' (4). The novelty of the model lies in that it does away with the older idea of kinship as rooted in 'pregiven natural facts'. This model can even incorporate former views in an encompassing understanding: the 'old' perception of kinship as a natural phenomenon is itself discovered to be an 'actively negotiated' social process. Retroactively, the discovery of the made character of kinship reveals that kinship previously was much more

a matter of choice than the language of the natural suggests (3–4). On the other hand, Franklin continues to speak of *biological* parenthood and points out that traditional kinship views remain important in shaping new phenomena such as IVF and transnational adoption. The overall impression is thus rather complex and full of tensions. However, Franklin highlights the transformation more than the complexity or the continuities in perceiving kinship as biological. As such, her analysis resonates with the views from historical and empirical research that point out the synchronic and diachronic diversity in family life.

This focus on 'transforming kinship' – the title of Franklin's survey – is in kinship anthropology often not just substantiated by the influence of the current differentiation of family forms and new technology, but also as the outcome of a methodological shift.[40] The old-school paradigm saw kinship as belonging to the non-Western world and originating in consanguinity. Kinship, then, refers to the extended family, which is regarded as of central importance to the organisation of so-called simple, undifferentiated or primitive societies.[41] In such basic kinship structures, natural and cultural aspects are mixed up. Western modern societies, on the other hand, clearly distinguish the biological from what is made or created. In this context, it is not kinship but the nuclear family that is of central importance.[42]

David Schneider is mentioned in many accounts as the founding father of the criticism of this paradigm.[43] In his 1984 *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Schneider aims to unmask the European bias inherent in the dominant anthropological kinship paradigm from the nineteenth century onwards. It is biased in that it presupposes that kinship is a 'distinct "thing"' (175), of biological origin, which is also universal, and which subsequently takes shape in different kinship 'systems'. This view persisted

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[40] According to the Australian anthropologist Mary Patterson, this shift as a result of self-criticism only applies to the dominant sections of Anglophone anthropology, whereas the discipline developed in a different direction in, for example, France ('Introduction: Reclaiming Paradigms Lost', *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 16/1 (2005): 1–17, at 2). In her critical review of the so-called new kinship studies, Patterson also notices a more ambiguous relationship to the notion of biology than they acknowledge themselves. Biology is both 'expunged' and 'foregrounded', in particular in studies of new reproductive technologies (8).

[41] This is how David Schneider characterises the 'conventional wisdom of anthropology', referring to authors like H. S. Maine, L. H. Morgan, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, W. H. R. Rivers, E. Durkheim and B. Malinowski (*A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), e.g., 187).

[42] Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15, 25.

[43] Schneider's critique of European biologistic views – foreshadowed in his earlier interest in the relation between nature and culture in *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1968) – is related to a broader shift in anthropology away from a focus on social structures and functions towards one on meaning (Franklin and McKinnon, *Relative Values*, 3; Carsten, *After Kinship,* 18–19).

despite the introduction of a sharp distinction between the social and what Schneider calls physical kinship (189–90). This distinction was advocated by most anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to 'free kinship from its simplistic formulation as a mere reflection of the state of biological relations of human reproduction' (192). This distinction, however, could not be radical because physical kinship remained the most important 'constraint on, or determinant of, social kinship'. Related to this view is the distinction between 'real' and 'fictive' kinship, which presents the biological bond as giving a specific strength missing in other relationships (172–3). This hierarchy of bonds is also expressed in the aphorism 'blood is thicker than water', which summarises the paradigm well, according to Schneider (e.g., 165). It is on this assumption that anthropology's 'Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind' is based, which states that primary genealogical relations between parents, spouses, and their children are the same in every culture. Variations occur in the weaker relations beyond these primary ones, and these can therefore be studied comparatively (174, 188). In sum, kinship relations are seen as distinct, strong relationships based on reproduction.

According to Schneider, this view of kinship is not based on fact, but derived from the specific ideology of European culture (e.g., 174–5, 193–4). He identifies this as having a 'biologistic' conception of being human – that is, 'formulated in terms of his place in nature, with a few caveats about his free will, intentionality, conscience and . . . extraordinary intelligence distinguishing him from other natural organisms' (175). Common-sense views are uncritically integrated into the analytic terminology of the social sciences. It may not be 'unreasonable' to assume that 'all people hold reproduction in as high value as we do', but Schneider is not convinced that this is simply true (194). What happens in this way of studying kinship is that the anthropologist's assumptions are imposed on the culture that is studied 'blindly and with unflagging loyalty to those assumptions' (196). As a result, little attention is paid to the specific character of the other culture and how meanings and values are shaped in this particular context. Almost all anthropological kinship studies thus assume beforehand what should rather be a question (198). The assumption has 'never been tested because it has been assumed to be self-evident' (199). This is not without irony, of course, as anthropology is committed to understanding other cultures without any ethnocentric bias (197).

Schneider's confrontation with the Eurocentric perspective implied in the study of kinship seems to leave little room for the project as such of studying kinship, or even of speaking about kinship as a distinct kind of

relationship. Kinship seems to have become an obsolete concept.[44] From this perspective, the actual developments within anthropology after Schneider come as a surprise. The expected breakdown of the discipline did not occur. On the contrary, what is perceived as a new approach to kinship arose in which kinship is no longer regarded as typical of 'simple', non-Western societies. This combined well with an anthropological interest in the new kinship-related developments in the Western world as a result of reproductive technology, large-scale institutionalised adoption and changing family composition. The Western fertility clinic or households involved in international adoption became contexts for anthropological fieldwork. Other influences contributed positively, such as feminist thinking, which put gender and personhood on the agenda. This turned out to be a roundabout route to new engagements with kinship-related institutions like marriage, family and procreation.[45]

The anthropological criticism of the view of kinship as based on the natural fact of reproduction is worlds apart from the pleas for a renewed appreciation of the natural character of family as found in Almond and Browning. Almond refers briefly to anthropological analyses by Marilyn Strathern,[46] but she apparently does not feel the need to defend her approach against this criticism, nor does Browning. Schneider traces the view of kinship as natural back to its origins in a general biologistic view of human beings that is typical of Europe. This analysis adds to our observation of the correspondence of Almond's and Browning's language of the natural to common parlance. Of course, Almond and Browning are primarily concerned with the European or Western context, but they do not make this explicit or show an awareness of how this context informs their conceptual framework. This is remarkable because this could easily have nuanced and, as a result, strengthened their approaches. In line with Schneider's criticism, they could have elaborated a view in which the precise way in which European culture gives or should give meaning to

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[44] Maurice Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, translated by Nora Scott (London: Verso, 2011), 19–22. Schneider himself states that, for him, the solution to the biased study cannot simply be 'to study it differently', although he can 'see where others might wish to' (*A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 200).

[45] For this analysis of the new kinship studies, see, for example, Franklin and McKinnon, *Relative Values*, 1; Carsten, *After Kinship*, 20–1.

[46] Almond (*The Fragmenting Family*, 96–7) highlights a remark from Strathern (*Reproducing the Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 34) in which she characterises the European views of kinship as having a 'biological base in procreation' and regarding it as 'a given baseline to human existence' and not something 'which only affects parents and children'. On the other hand, Almond immediately admits that 'social anthropologists are now more inclined to interpret kinship in cultural rather than biological terms'.

this natural fact of reproduction is outlined.[47] Such an approach, however, presupposes that the terminology of the natural does not speak for itself. Almond and Browning use it precisely as if its meaning were self-evident.

This brief comparison reveals the relevance of the methodological debate within kinship anthropology for our question of understanding family in relation to givenness. The unmasking of the Eurocentric focus on biology deepens the critical evaluation of the ethical views aiming for a restoration of the natural character of family. It also leads to the question of whether givenness may still be a meaningful notion if one attempts to get beyond this bias. Moreover, does kinship remain a meaningful notion at all if its distinctiveness can no longer be regarded as originating in biological facts? We will analyse these questions in relation to both the methodology of the anthropological studies and their outcomes – that is, the actual views of kinship they identify in different cultures. As we have already indicated, the studies point out that references to biology and nature are present in current Western views of kinship. They are seen as a problematic basis for anthropological methodology, however. What does this tension mean for the actual anthropological analysis of contemporary developments in kinship? To investigate this tension and its relevance for our study of family and givenness more closely, we will analyse some post-Schneider kinship studies by Marilyn Strathern and Sarah Franklin.

Marilyn Strathern and Sarah Franklin: The Persistence of the Natural and Its Anthropological Unmasking

Marilyn Strathern's work from the early 1990s is often presented as the most important pioneering research in this area of transformed kinship studies after Schneider, which nevertheless acknowledges his criticism (Franklin, *Biological Relatives*, 20; Carsten, *After Kinship*, 21). In these studies, Strathern combines insights from the methodological debate with studies of concrete kinship practices in her own British context and other parts of the world. She investigates in particular the interaction between what she regards as the old, traditional kinship discourses dominated by 'nature' or 'biology' and the new reproductive technologies of her day.[48] According to Strathern, the major change that results from new technologies is that kinship is no longer the domain par excellence of 'what

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[47] Schneider himself quotes sociobiology to oppose the idea that 'blood is thicker than water' is true as a biological fact (199).

[48] Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Strathern, *Reproducing the Future*.

is taken for granted' (*Reproducing the Future*, 16–21). It was precisely this taken-for-granted character that was expressed in the language of biology. Kin were called *biological* relatives. The term 'biological' did 'double symbolic service' (18), according to Strathern. First, as a 'taken-for-granted reference point', it functioned as the central defining characteristic of kin relations. Second, the biological indicated the level of the 'immutable or taken for granted in the human condition' (19).

Meanings started to change when reproductive technology was introduced as 'assisting nature'. Biological views nonetheless remain important. This is visible in that the reproductive technologies entail a primarily physical view of conceiving a child – that is, as a process which operates 'independently from human intention' and cannot be expressed in a social discourse of relations (Strathern, *Reproducing the Future*, 20–8). The same holds true for the view of personhood present in the discourse on these technologies. Personhood is perceived primarily as a physical entity that emerges at a specific point in the natural process between conception and birth (21–3). Strathern opposes this to a view of the 'person' as making sense only in the context of an existence in 'interdependence with other human beings'. As a result of the one-sided physical view, much of the debate concerning the use of embryos for scientific purposes focusses on the issue of when precisely the person comes into existence.

Another example of the prevalence and even reinforcement of the discourse of nature or biology is that assisted reproduction creates the categories of the 'biological parent' and the 'social parent' who lacks the 'biological credentials' (20). In spite of the fact that the biological parents only exist by virtue of the social parents, they are not regarded as socially unimportant, but as 'conferring identity' (24). This becomes clear in the conviction that the child has a right to know who his or her biological parents are, which is by now the leading argument in a variety of national legislations on sperm and egg donation. Social parenthood, on the other hand, is seen as more meaningful than biological relationships or surrogacy as such. Nevertheless, Strathern points out that 'the social' remains a category that exists only 'by reference to a non-social aspect of development' that lies at its basis (25). Social parenthood is, moreover, perceived as uncertain in comparison to the certain fact of biological parenthood, which is shown in the fact that it should be assisted or protected by law. Of course, there is also legislation on the rights of biological donor parents, but this functions to confirm their non-social character.

The fact that kinship is now 'doubly assisted' by technology and by law indicates the core of the change to which Strathern points: kinship is no

longer in the category of 'taken for granted' (20). This, according to Strathern, removes the former distinctiveness of the domain of kinship. Nevertheless, she states that in the future it may very well be that the idea of a 'natural basis' will persist (28). Its meaning will be influenced by actual developments in biology and genetics.

Strathern not only analyses this disappearance of the taken-for-granted character; she is also critical of its effects, in particular of a new dominance of the choice paradigm.[49] Whereas kin relations were formerly regarded as 'non-negotiable', of a 'given nature' and 'immutable', Strathern argues, people are now 'urged always to exercise preference and choice' (28), also in these relations.[50] It is now possible to think in entirely new ways of procreation as 'subject to personal preference and choice' and of children as embodying this choice (34). Strathern points out that this view implies a specific meaning of 'choice' shaped by the rise of an 'Enterprise Culture' (35). Within this matrix, choice based on individual desire – 'who wants what' (32) – is regarded as the basic principle of human acting. As regards the new reproductive technology, the desire at stake is having 'a child of one's own' (20). This desire is widely assumed to be human. When 'nature fails' – as so expressed in common parlance – this desire is the legitimate basis for 'intervening in biology'. People seeking such assistance are regarded not as ill or disabled, but as 'customers seeking services' (35). Strathern's critical remarks concern the inconsistency, even 'absurdity' of thinking in terms of choice only: thus, choice becomes a 'prescription' rather than an 'enablement' (36). There is no longer any measure to 'enterprise' (35), no limit to desire (57). Enterprise Culture no longer reckons with an opposite of choice, like 'life from which intervention is absent' (57), or a 'given' symbolised in biology (34–5). There may still be a 'given', but this is no longer defined by nature itself, but by what technology makes possible. Technological services may still be regarded as a form of 'assisting nature' and of achieving the parents' desire that is in its turn also viewed as 'natural' (57). However, this 'nature' is no longer a real opposite to choice, as the effects of physiology once were. Strathern does not go as far as pleading for such a limit to choice, but she does point out the one-sided voluntarist language as problematic because of its limit-less character. Moreover, she remarks that people also fear this

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[49] Strathern openly acknowledges this in her introduction and calls it 'criticising anthropology-fashion: to make its new analogies work for how we might think old problems' (*Reproducing the Future*, 8).

[50] The central example of this pattern of thinking is the 1989 'Glover Report on Reproductive Technologies to the European Commission', which she characterises as 'suffused with an ideology of preference and choice' (Strathern, *Reproducing the Future*, 28).

boundlessness, which becomes clear in the anxiety that surrounds new technology (57–8). Strathern's conclusion that 'there seems nothing that is not the result of, or at least shows the encroachment of, human enterprise upon it' sounds like a complaint (50).

In her criticism of the lack of contrast between 'what is given in the world with what is artificial' and her thoughts about the future consequences of this view (60), Strathern comes close to moral reflection on whether these are good developments.[51] Thus, she herself indicates the relevance of her analyses for ethics. These analyses are precisely what was lacking in the ethical pleas for a renewed appreciation of the natural character of family in Almond and Browning. The latter two do not analyse the actual developments that have contributed to a less self-evident understanding of family as natural, nor do they address the tension that continues to exist with the equally present interest in views of naturalness. Strathern's different approach shows that the language of the natural may be analysed for its power to express the opposite of choice, the taken-for-granted character of kinship. This meta-reflection may even be used constructively as an argument in favour of the use of this language. Strathern herself, despite her critical observations, does not go into a more elaborate ethical reflection. Nor does she feel the need to explain why she does not. She seems to regard the anthropologist's task as pointing to the shifts in meaning and the inconsistencies or paradoxes that result from it.

It is remarkable that Strathern claims in passing that the paradoxes which result from the changing views of the natural do not afflict the terminology of anthropology itself. From the perspective of an anthropologist, she says, the 'biological facts' are also 'cultural facts' – that is, 'constructs that are themselves socially or culturally motivated' (28). Moreover, the 'concept of culture is already problematised' in anthropology, just like the notion of the 'artefact' (60). The anthropological concepts thus seem to already have left the troubles of ordinary language and practices behind. Anthropology seems to be viewed as helping Europeans wake up to the fact that 'future kinship' will no longer provide them with 'metaphors for the natural givens of human existence nor with metaphors for regeneration through the spontaneous effects of procreation' (61). These remarks are clearly rooted in the aforementioned methodological struggle to liberate anthropology from the view of kinship as natural or

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[51] Examples of passages that touch upon the normative are found in, for example, Strathern, *Reproducing the Future*, 30, 35, 57, 59.

biological. It is not clear how precisely they relate to her observation of the prevalence of the language of the natural and to her critical evaluation of a one-sided focus on choice. Is the concept of 'cultural construct' compatible with the experiences of family as 'given' and not 'chosen' or 'made'? These questions recall the discrepancy found in Franklin's analyses between a recent change to a focus on choice in kinship views and the persistence of the language of the natural. Again, we trace a moment of an impasse in the understanding of family: the anthropological critique of the views of family as given cannot be harmonised with the anthropological observation of the actual persistence of these views. In the anthropological methodological meta-language, this impasse is not visible due to the dominance of the former perspective, which leaves less room for elaborating on the latter experiences of givenness or what is taken for granted.

A similar incongruence or impasse can be noticed in another text by Franklin, her large monograph *Biological Relatives* on the consequences of new reproductive technology which dates from the same year as the aforementioned survey article. In this book, Franklin uses reproductive technology, in particular IVF, as a looking glass for understanding the broader issue of the changing views of what counts as natural or biological. Franklin concludes that 'biology has become a technology' while technology is becoming 'more "biologized"' (3). By this she refers to practices like the technological making of cells and working with genes as well as to the fact that new human life is made via this technology. In vitro fertilisation is a good case study for analysing how such new technological developments are appropriated. Franklin emphasises that, at first sight, IVF clearly seems to 'reproduce dominant kinship patterns' as it focusses on the 'biological fertilization of two gametes' and a 'biologically based system of descent and family formation' (6). The new technique thus does not seem to change the existing views of kinship as something 'natural'. This may also explain why it has rapidly become 'normalized', almost 'routine'. However, Franklin discovered in her research that people who undergo IVF do not simply experience it that way. They are much more ambivalent about it. Apparently, IVF also 'challenges or contradicts' existing views and norms (7). Franklin regards this ambivalence as typical of how technology in general is experienced at present.

So far, Franklin's analyses reveal the persistence of references to what is natural in kinship views. The impasse can be seen when we look at the way Franklin recaps these developments in technology and biology. In her summarising passages, she speaks only of 'the emergence of biological relativity' (4) and not so much of the persistence of the paradigm of the

natural. By 'relativity', Franklin indicates 'a process through which the biological has become a more explicitly contingent, or relative, condition' (16). It is the process in which 'nature and artifice became interchangeable' (21). In this process, biology is 'not only denaturalized but "cultured up"' (4). This interpretation of current developments as relativising what was once natural and thus absolute sounds similar to the emphasis in Franklin's conclusions concerning the social character of kinship. Moreover, this interpretation is just as well projected backwards onto earlier forms of kinship, which are then discovered to be 'characterized by enormous flexibility in spite of often being tied to deterministic models' (16). Franklin refers to Strathern's research to underscore how well IVF displays this relativity. Strathern shows, she argues, the 'irony' of IVF which 'explicitly artificialized the very facts of life that were formerly imagined to ground the natural origins of gender and sex: these facts were rendered contingent, or relativized, by the very technology developed to "assist" them' (20–1). Franklin calls this the 'paradox of IVF' (21, 29): the technology developed to serve to 'reproduce biological offspring' at the same time as it 'denaturalized biological reproduction' (21). Franklin points out how her analyses are nourished by a broader critique of models of sex, gender and reproduction coming from feminist thinking (19–20). Feminism challenged the biologism that regards 'natural' characteristics as implying certain automatic behaviour or roles and pointed out the social character of arrangements concerned with these topics. Judith Butler is quoted approvingly for her theory of 'technologies of gender' (183). Butler's analysis that in gender constructions a 'naturalized origin' is imagined 'as if it were prior to the cultural expectations it confirms' is also valid for the ways in which IVF is imagined, according to Franklin. In all these interpretive, summarising moments of Franklin's argument, there is a clear emphasis on the downplaying of the meaning of the natural. As a result, the analysis of its persistence is less understandable.

The Difficulty of Accounting for Kinship as Given

Strathern and Franklin share a critical thread related to Schneider's aim of unmasking of what counts as 'natural' in kinship relations, as in fact 'relative' or a 'cultural construct'. Strathern relates this criticism to the methodological change in anthropology, but also to the actual decrease of the taken-for-granted character in current Western views of kinship. Recent developments in reproductive technology are crucial to this change. Her focus on these developments makes her no less aware, however, of the

persistence of some kind of language of 'the natural' nor less interested in the precise meanings of this language. Moreover, she is critical of the idea of limitless choice that results from the absence of a real opposite to choice, like the givenness of nature once was. Such givenness is not taken into account constructively, however, in her anthropological understanding of kinship as cultural construct. A similar tension, or even an impasse, can be seen in Franklin. She concludes that biology is cultured up and thus relativised as a result of recent reproductive technology, whereas the latter is all but an expression of this relativising. Central to this technology is the importance of having a 'child of one's own' – that is, a biologically related child. The rise of this technology is unthinkable without a strong notion of natural kinship. Franklin's main aim, however, seems to be to unmask this notion – for example, by pointing out that this notion is incompatible with experiences of people who actually undergo IVF. This impasse visible in both authors indicates that the aspect of givenness is difficult to incorporate in the anthropological terminology, although they are very well aware of it.

We also analyse the anthropological debate because it gives deeper insight into current ways of dealing with family as given in Western contexts. The new kinship anthropology in particular studies kinship in settings in which it is an issue, as in the case of adoption or the use of reproductive technology. In these contexts, there are clear signs of a greater emphasis on choice in the understanding of kinship. Kinship is seen as a domain under human influence and no longer as obvious and unchangeable. On the other hand, human influence on kinship is still made sense of against the background of something given. Human intervention is regarded as contributing to something that is already there but needs support, in particular the longing for a family, the wish to have children. This view of kinship as given also implies that there is something good to it. Our general characterisation of our time as having difficulty with the notion of givenness may thus be specified. There is indeed a dominant discourse of choice, but a feeling for givenness is not entirely absent. The two even come together in paradoxical notions like characterising reproductive science as 'assisting nature'. The language of the natural seems to remain the self-evident discourse to express this given aspect of the family. Both the works of Strathern and Franklin thus reveal a tension in contemporary Western developments between a decrease and an increase in understanding kinship as natural.

The paradigm shift in the anthropological approach away from 'nature' leaves, however, little room to account for the tension visible in contemporary Western kinship views. We noticed the moments of impasse that

arise as a result of it. The shift leads to an anthropological terminology dominated by the idea that kinship is a cultural construct and not to be 'presumed as natural'. This terminology implies disapproval of the tendency to think of kinship in natural terms because it conceals that it is in fact a cultural construct. Such a construct may imply references to what is natural or given, but it is important to acknowledge that, in fact, nothing is given in any substantial sense. This disapproval of the language of the natural and givenness recalls the opposite disapproval found in Almond and Browning, in the sense that both lack a clear underpinning and do not stimulate moral reflection on what precisely family or kinship means. In both cases, it is unclear how these pleas can be related to the contemporary situation as they analyse it – that is, as either lacking an awareness of the natural or as characterised by a persistence of it. We earlier criticised this ethical thinking as ending moral reflection rather than giving rise to it. In this respect, the anthropological accounts generate more reflection because they also lay bare the ambiguity of the actual situation in which technology both undoes biological views and reinforces them. The moments of impasse that we observed are again fruitful for our project because they point out the need for a different level and mode of reflection, one in which the ambiguity can be accounted for without solving it. This is another impulse to a mystery approach. The anthropological analyses refrain from giving a full moral judgement on the developments, which may be explained by the more descriptive character of their anthropological approach. Neither do they aim for a systematic analysis of the meanings of kinship or propose an alternative definition of kinship that incorporates its character as a cultural construct. As a result, they do not reflect on the difficulty of naming the meanings of kinship, although their material reveals this difficulty, in particular as regards the aspect of givenness.

A more systematic reflection on the meanings of kinship and the difficulty to name them can perhaps be found in a recent book by Marshall Sahlins, an anthropologist who has dealt with the problematic character of references to biology and nature since early in his career.[52] In his book with the significant title *What Kinship Is – And Is Not* (2013), he aims to arrive at an alternative understanding of kinship – that is, as 'mutuality of being'. Sahlins' argument is not presented as an ethical one either, but his polemics against the understanding of kinship in terms of nature or biology are

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[52] For example, Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976); *Hierarchy, Equality, and the Sublimation of Anarchy: The Western Illusion of Human Nature*, Tanner Lectures on Human Values, delivered at the University of Michigan November 4 2005, https://bit.ly/3XWYtf7 (later published at Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008).

much more fierce, which may be why he feels compelled to come up with an alternative account. This makes his approach relevant to our question of how family as a distinct sphere and family as a given relate to each other. Moreover, this publication shows that, despite more than thirty years of anthropological debate since Schneider, the issue of the natural character of kinship has not yet been settled. Apparently, the understanding in terms of the natural is persistent in current Western views of kinship. Why is the debate not regarded as long past? Again, we will analyse this debate with an eye to what it reveals about the status of givenness in our time.

Marshall Sahlins' 'Mutuality of Being': Understanding Kinship beyond Biology

Sahlins' book is intended as an indictment of the view that biology is the basis of kinship and a demonstration of the idea (2) that 'as constituted from birth to death and even beyond, kinship is culture, all culture' (89).[53] Strikingly, what was an accomplished fact for Strathern twenty years earlier is for Sahlins a point that still needs to be combatted: 'kinship is not biology'. At the same time, Sahlins acknowledges from the outset that '[i]t seems fair to say that the current anthropological orthodoxy in kinship studies can be summed up in the proposition that any relationship consti- tuted in terms of procreation, filiation, or descent can also be made postnatally or performatively by culturally appropriate action' (2). Moreover, he starts his argument with the concession that Schneider has already convincingly shown from 1968 onwards that the idea that '"blood" ties are "natural" and irrecoverable' is part of 'our native folklore' (4) – that is, of the American or Western context. Sahlins' arguments for returning to the old issue of unmasking biologistic views are hard to identify. The main part of the book consists of numerous ethnographic examples intended to demonstrate the incorrectness of the biologistic views. Constructively, the examples serve to underpin his alternative view that kinship is 'mutuality of being'. Apparently, Sahlins regards this alternative view as a new and urgent contribution to the old nature–culture debate. As a reader, one starts to wonder why it is so difficult to leave behind the idea of the biological character of kinship. Or should one rather wonder why it remains important to oppose biologistic views in anthropology?

   If one tries to identify the biologistic views that are still present, accord- ing to Sahlins, a clear picture does not arise. The few references to the views

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[53] Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – And Is Not* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

are sketchy and usually formulated rather tendentiously. In these vague hints, two variants seem to be present: hidden and explicit biologistic views. First of all, Sahlins signals that, in anthropology, also among what he calls constructivists, and even for Schneider himself, it is difficult to completely do away with the nature–culture distinction. Precisely in arguing against a biologistic understanding of kinship, the constructivists remain focussed on consanguinity. Affinity, the other side of kinship, apparently does not need to be unmasked as 'made'. Sahlins quotes Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who argues that 'the sense of an organic connection is merely extended from the sphere of the given to that of the constructed'.[54] As a result, 'biology is still there, only it has less value than it had before, and sometimes less value than the socially constituted'. Even Schneider reproduced the contrast between the 'given' and the 'made' he himself had exposed in Western kinship views. Without being aware of this, he reproduces it in distinguishing a 'cultural system of symbols and meanings' from 'social action' (Sahlins, *What Kinship Is*, 14). The former is then defined as 'static and "given"', while human action only deals with a 'normative system' that is 'processual' and 'appropriate to decision making or interaction models of analysis'.[55] Apart from this hidden continuation of the old distinction, there is the explicit one of anthropologists, accompanied by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, who have 'long contended' the distinction between 'real' and 'fictive' kinship.[56] The former is seen as 'established by birth', 'genealogical' or a tie of 'blood', while the latter is said to be 'only a metaphor'. Sahlins states that this view has been dominant in kinship anthropology since Lewis Morgan formulated it in 1871, with only some minor revisions over the course of time (64). The 'decisive fallacy' of such a view is that it 'takes the parents of the child out of their social contexts and presumes they are abstract beings, without any identity except a genital one, who produce an equally abstract child out of the union of their bodily substances' (74). Sahlins hints not only at the dangers of these hidden and explicit continuations of the biologistic views, but also at those of a deconstructionist view. This concludes from the

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[54] Sahlins, *What Kinship Is*, 11; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'The Gift and the Given: Three Nano-Essays on Kinship and Magic', in *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered*, ed. by Sandra Bamford and James Leach (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 237–68.

[55] Sahlins, *What Kinship Is*, 13. Sahlins also criticises Schneider's analogy of kinship and 'Native American concepts of "nationalism" and again "religion"' as parallel aspects of society that should not be regarded as belonging to the ontological level of culture (14).

[56] Sahlins, *What Kinship Is*, 63. Without going into details, Sahlins mentions four protagonists of this view, dating back to the nineteenth-century Lewis Henry Morgan as the founding father of this genealogical view of kinship (64).

flexible and instable character of kinship practices that kinship is no longer a meaningful category (9).

Over against these imprecisely demarcated fronts, Sahlins advances his own view. Kinship relations do have a distinctive quality, that of 'mutuality of being'.[57] This relates to experiences which Sahlins indicates with different formulations: being 'intrinsic to' or 'participating in' one another's existence, being 'mutual persons', 'intersubjective belonging', 'transbodily being' and 'mystical' experiences 'whereby what one person does or suffers also happens to others' (2). These formulations recall those of Butler and Ciavatta in Chapter 2. With the term 'mutuality of being', Sahlins claims to cover all kinds of kinship relations among all cultures, which does not mean he is 'trying to prove empirically what kinship is' (2). He relates this view to a 'tradition that stretches back from Strathern, Marriott, and Bastide; through Leenhardt, Lévy-Bruhl, and Durkheim; to certain passages of Aristotle on the distinctive friendship of kinship' (20). Salient examples of 'mutuality of being' range from the Maori expression of 'being born in the other', the English 'belonging to each other', the Nyakyusa (Africa) 'being members of each other' or the Karembola (Madagascar) 'being one people', 'people of one kind' or 'owning one another' (21–3). These relations can be formed by 'commensality, sharing food, reincarnation, co-residence, shared memories, working together, blood brotherhood, adoption, friendship, shared suffering, and so on' – that is, in 'indefinitely many' ways (8, cf. 68). Sahlins mentions these examples of what he calls 'performative modes of kinship' to show that kinship is not 'given by birth as such' and that the 'valuation of the genitor and genetrix' can be very different, even one of exclusion of both (3). Moreover, intervention by a spiritual third party, like ancestors, gods, spirits or 'the potency acquired from captured enemies' (4), is often seen as necessary for 'producing another human being'. Finally, different substances can be involved in the connection of genitors and their offspring, like 'blood, semen, milk, bone, genes, flesh soul, etc.'. Sahlins concludes that 'there is nothing inevitable about the kinship of procreation' as even men can be mothers and women fathers (5).

Sahlins' aim in establishing this idea of kinship as 'mutuality of being' is to do justice to how kinship is shaped across different cultures. Central to his approach is that it is the larger 'kinship order' and not primarily birth relationships that determine the meanings of kinship (65, 76). Sahlins also points out why this has not been noticed enough in anthropology that

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[57] Sahlins uses the phrase 'mutuality of being' in his 2005 Tanner Lectures as well to characterise kinship and refers to Aristotle as the origin of the phrase (Sahlins, *Hierarchy, Equality*, 98).

remained fixed on biology, birth and procreation. The cause lies in an individualistic view of human beings and thus also of their relationships, one that is, again, typical of the Western world. The complementarity of biologism and egocentrism has caused distortions in Western anthropological analyses of other cultures. Kinship is approached as 'lived and learned by individuals' also in its organised forms in society as a whole (66). Sahlins realises he is not the first to point to this contrast between Western views and those of other cultures, and refers to the nineteenth-century anthropologist E. B. Tylor (31), as well as to Strathern's discussion of the 'dividual' Melanasian view of persons for similar ideas (24). Strathern's discussion aims explicitly to point out an alternative to the 'autonomous Western individual – which in any case does not describe such individuals in their own family and kindred contexts' (25). In Strathern, as well as in anthropology in general, however, this taking into account of dividual views of human beings did not correct their being focussed on the individual person. It rather stimulated it by engaging with a new, relational view of the person as composed of everything he or she shares with particular others.

Sahlins analyses this attention to persons as 'composite sites of the relationships that produced them' (24) as less radical than his own view of 'mutuality of being' or 'intersubjective existence' (28). 'Mutuality of being' makes a stronger, fundamental contrast with the individualistic view by denying the 'necessary independence of the entities so related, as well as the necessary substantiality and physicality of the relationship' (32). Sahlins' idea of participating in each other's existence is thus not something secondary, something that takes place between beings that 'are given beforehand' (33). It is 'necessary for beings to be given and exist'.[58] The fundamental character is also expressed in Sahlins' suggestion that this participation is 'an inherent disposition of human sociality and the distinctive quality of kinship' (43). Acknowledging this disposition would imply a paradigm shift, which Sahlins describes as sending the 'egocentric anthropology of kinship' to the 'dustbin of superseded paradigms'.[59]

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[58] Sahlins refers to Leenhardt's 1949 commentary on the notebooks of Lévy-Bruhl and his idea of participation as 'shared existence'.

[59] Sahlins suggests 'mutuality of being' as such an inherent human disposition at the conclusion of a 'parenthetical' section (*What Kinship Is*, 37–44) on the findings of experimental research among young infants by the developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello and others. This research discovered a capacity to 'synthesize the distinction of self and other in interactively created common projects that involve shared interests, perspectives and goals' (37). This capacity is called 'shared intentionality', 'we-ness' or 'we-intentionality'. Sahlins observes a lot of correspondence between this psychological view and his own idea of 'mutuality of being', also as regards its contrasting with the reigning research focus on the individual.

In Sahlins' conception, 'mutuality of being' does not just refer to the ways kinship is constituted, but also to the ways it is lived, the practices and experiences distinctive of people so related. The solidarity in their being may, for example, result in their knowing 'each other's doings and sufferings as their own' (45). They may 'immediately feel' what has happened to their kinsmen as something that also happens to themselves.[60] Experience as a bodily sensation is, then, not confined to the individual, but 'diffused among persons'. Sahlins quotes Monica Wilson, who calls this idea of diffused experience among kin 'mystical interdependence' (46). She refers to mourning customs in which the living share in the death of their kin by, for example, consuming parts of the deceased or by self-mutilation, tearing clothes or withdrawing from everyday practices like washing oneself or working, as well as by temporarily taking on themselves the identity of the deceased. A similar unity or 'immanence in one another' is also recorded regarding relations between spouses (48). Examples of this are women's sharing in the experience of absent husbands or men in their wives' menstruation, pregnancy and giving birth (49). 'Mutuality of being' also makes intelligible the transmission of sins from the father to his children and other kin. Other examples are the experiences of sharing in the suffering of a relative and the shame or disgrace related to it, which is, for example, visible in the fact that all relatives are compensated for the suffering of one (50–1). In a different way, this sharing is visible in that kin take responsibility for the well-being of their relative's body, in feeding and caring for it, which implies a social understanding of the body (51–2). Eating can then be experienced as not a response to individual needs, but as a recognition of relationships; the eating of the one person directly affects the well-being of the other. Sahlins summarises all these practices and experiences by concluding that 'among kinfolk neither interest nor agency are individual facts – again in contrast to the self-fashioning, self-interested individual as we know him ... Agency is in the unity of the duality; it is an act of we-ness' (52–3).

Striking in Sahlins' book is that this detailed, varied and subtle exposition of the idea of kinship as 'mutuality of being' is accompanied by such a fierce polemics against biologistic views that lacks nuance. As we have seen, Sahlins does not specify the authors or branches in anthropology precisely in which the biologistic views prevail nor explain how this prevalence is possible, given the long-standing anthropological criticism. Neither does he give a detailed

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[60] Sahlins takes this quote from J. Prytz Johansen's studies of the Maori (1954), from which he often cites. It is remarkable that Sahlins refers to this 'immediacy' of feeling, as he himself seems to state precisely the opposite just before – that is, the sharing of experiences should not be understood 'in the sense of direct sensation, of course, but at the level of meaning' (*What Kinship Is*, 44).

argument as to why this biologism is so problematic. He only states that it demonstrates an individualistic view of human beings and their relatedness and thus does not do justice to the many ethnographic reports of non-Western societies in particular. Apparently, however, the latter ethnographic research was attentive to the non-genealogical character of kinship and thus did not suffer from a biologistic and individualistic bias at all. Sahlins nevertheless states that it is 'high time to investigate these culturally variable conceptions of conception' (76, cf. 74 'rarely if ever'), which suggests that this has not been done before. The necessity of a change is emphasised by stating that what is 'ethnographically at stake' here is 'the hypothesis that relations of procreation are patterned by the kinship order in which they are embedded'. This hypothesis is apparently not yet established truth, in spite of the fact that ethnographic reports to the contrary are so easily available. Sahlins does not explain this either.[61]

Towards the end of the book, however, one discussion stands out that does not seem to fit into this radical rejection of the biological view. It opens with Sahlins' avowal that 'a problem remains'. This concerns kinship relations established after birth and beyond genealogical ties. The problem is that these relations are 'nevertheless formulated in (apparently) genea-logical terms' (72). Does this not show, Sahlins then suggests rhetorically, that 'in the end kinship is founded on biological relationships?' He answers by referring to 'innovative discussions of the problem' by Robert McKinley (1981). McKinley denies that these 'genealogical-cum-biological' formula-tions reveal a biological foundation. Rather, these meanings are 'metaphors borrowed from folk biology' (72–3). He explains this metaphorical use only by stating that 'folk biology provides the closest conceptual model for this type of linkability' which is, in fact, social. Genealogy offers a cultural construction of the biological facts that are supposed to be 'pre-existing'. Earlier on in his argument, Sahlins attacked the theories of fictive kinship because they explain non-genealogical kinship as secondary, expressed in a metaphorical use of the terminology of primary, biological relations.

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[61] The role of ethnographic material in more general reflections on the meaning of kinship is a delicate one. A striking example of this in a recent volume on the meaning of parenthood (see Chapter 1, notes 29, 30 and 32) is the reference to the culture of the Mosuo or Na in south-west China to support two opposing views of kinship. The sociologist Judith Stacey refers to this and other examples to demonstrate the diversity of family life. In the next chapter, anthropologist Peter Wood argues that, in general, societies prefer clearly identifiable parents who bear responsibility for their children. 'Fictive kin' are exceptions to this main pattern. See Judith Stacey, 'Uncoupling Marriage and Parenting', in *What Is Parenthood? Contemporary Debates about the Family*, ed. by Linda C. McClain and Daniel Cere (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 65–84, and Peter Wood, 'The Anthropological Case for the Integrative Model', in *What Is Parenthood?*, 65–104.

Now, however, it becomes clear that birth itself is the metaphor. 'Primary terms are already metaphorical', for they do not necessarily imply a 'substantive connection' between parents and with their child (73). Sahlins admits that parent–child and sibling terms are indeed used broadly to denote kinship relations. He states this is because of their social character – that is, of being relations of co-existence and 'mutuality of being' (73–4) and not because they are 'logically or temporally prior to culture, let alone to kinship' (77). A final relevant remark as regards biologism is then found in the modestly formulated but far-reaching conclusion: 'It is probably better not to speak of "biology" at all, folk or otherwise, since few or no peoples other than Euro-Americans understand themselves to be constructed upon – or in fundamental ways, against – some biological-corporeal substratum. For many their kinship is already given in their flesh' (77). The rest of the book consists mainly in ethnographic reports that demonstrate this idea of kinship as 'already given in their flesh'.

In these final passages, we observe again the tension between the anthropological understanding of kinship as 'all culture' and the actual ethnographic material which displays connotations of givenness. Sahlins' overview of meanings of kinship clearly shows that genealogical terminology abounds, even in the designation of non-genealogical relations. The polemics of a correct cultural view over against an incorrect biological view do not stimulate an elaborate reflection on the biological language that is nevertheless present. Again, we observe a moment of impasse. The questions rise why precisely these metaphors of birth, parent–child and sibling relations dominate, and what they mean when their use is metaphorical. These issues are not explored. Neither do Sahlins' polemics create room for a clear analysis of what precisely is wrong about the metaphorical use of the language of biology or nature. Is not the terminology that Sahlins proposes as an alternative, kinship as 'given in one's flesh' (77), also such a metaphor? The reason this language would be inherently individualistic is not expressed in an extensive argument either, but is again polemically suggested by Sahlins. In principle, it does not seem impossible at all to have a relational understanding of biological or genetic relations, even up to an idea of transpersonal being. Sahlins does not consider this option of a meaningful metaphorical use of biological language.

The Aversion to Biologistic Views and Givenness as Mystery

We turned to Sahlins' recent text because he formulates a view of kinship as 'mutuality of being', which he emphatically introduces as an alternative to the incorrect biological views. This suggested a more systematic approach

to the study of the meanings of kinship than was found in the studies of Strathern and Franklin. In the end, however, Sahlins' proposal of an alternative terminology does not take the form of a systematic theory of 'mutuality of being', in which the meanings of this notion are elaborated in detail, or different strands and sub-meanings are distinguished. Rather, he gives various concrete examples from non-Western cultures that illustrate the non-biological character of kinship: kinship is established by different practices like living or working together or sharing food, in which diverse substances may be involved, but also by shared suffering or friendship. Often even death cannot undo these relations. Apart from the detailed examples, more general characterisations of kinship figure, like 'being intrinsic to' or 'participating in' one another's existence. These are loosely related to the overarching term 'mutuality of being'. The alternative terminology seems to be deliberately indefinite or open, and consists of uncommon expressions.

Sahlins does not reflect on this open and uncommon character of his terms or build an argument in favour of it, but the terminology clearly displays an awareness of the difficulty to name what kinship means: new words or expressions taken from non-Western cultures are needed to capture these meanings. Moreover, some of these expressions also have the connotation of a sacred dimension, as shown in Sahlins' qualifications like 'mystical' and involving a 'spiritual third party'. Again, this does not mean that we find in his text an elaborate argument in favour of acknowledging the difficulty of making sense of kinship or a theory on the character of kinship language. However, Sahlins' search for alternative, non-biological terms and his highlighting of uncommon, indefinite expressions clearly resonate with our approach to family as mystery. Sahlins offers language which acknowledges this mystery character. Although Sahlins does not arrive at such general conclusions, 'mutuality of being' seems to point out that kinship is about being related in a way that is so fundamental that people become part of each other. They cannot be imagined on their own. This means that 'being' is experienced as fundamentally relational. People cannot be seen apart from their relations. The moments in which this is experienced are in part described as implying an experience of the sacred. Sahlins' examples of mutuality of being thus provide us with new terms that seem suited to evoke family as mystery.

In addition, one may wonder whether the anthropological criticism of biological views in general may not be seen as an appeal to acknowledge this mystery character. Is not the heart of this criticism that biological views falsely suggest a clarity – that is, that kinship relations result only from being someone's genetic descendant? This is a clear view, but one that

simplifies and cannot account for the great diversity of kinship views present among cultures. It moreover suggests that all meanings attributed to kinship should be seen as secondary, a making sense of facts. There is little awareness of mystery in this account which founds kinship in facts. Perhaps concrete meanings attributed to kinship may sound 'mysterious', but these are not seen as expressions of what kinship actually is – that is, a relation based on procreation. Anthropology unmasks these biological views of kinship as displaying a Western understanding of the world in which facts revealed by the sciences are primary and human beings are seen as autonomous individuals. This analysis deepens our criticism of the use of the language of the natural in ethical views on family. There we concluded that this language due to its claim of obviousness ends moral reflection rather than giving rise to it. The anthropological criticism confirms this characterisation and clarifies why moral reflection is not stimulated: the level of the factual is distinguished as primary from the secondary one of 'meaning'. The true core of kinship remains its basis in procreation. Meanings as expressed in, for example, religious symbols may deepen the awareness of this core, like Browning argued, but they remain contingent. This distinction between primary and secondary does not give rise to the question of what the genetic tie means also for our acting. Meaning is displaced by the facts. Family is there where genetically related people share their lives.

While the anthropological criticism thus confirms and deepens our argument to acknowledge the difficulty of naming what family might mean, we also noticed moments of impasse. The dominance of this criticism results in an inability to take into account the references to nature, biology or birth in kinship views. The unmasking of the biological theory of kinship as incorrect implies the incorrectness of such 'folk' notions in which the language of the natural prevails. Strathern and Franklin reveal that these notions are still present in the Western context in which kinship is at the same time more and more perceived as 'made' by means of technology or by actively chosen kinship in the form of adoption. Sahlins finally admits that, among non-Western cultures, kinship language that refers to parent–child and sibling relations is widespread even if the actual kinship relations are not established by birth. All three authors disapprove of this quasi-factual language and emphasise that anthropology unmasks it as a cultural construct or metaphorical. The room criticism of biological views creates to analyse the precise character of the constructions of kinship in our time is not fully put to use due to the dominance of the polemical nature of the analyses.

Why is this polemics so dominant that it leads to these impasses? The heated character of the debate shows once more that family is a topic on which passions run high. Something is clearly at stake in this subject and in particular in the view of family as natural or biological. The debate on this view is not regarded as settled, but continues up to today. This underlines the observations on the controversial character of the topic of family from which we started our research. Critics of the paradigm shift in anthropology away from nature notice the dominance of this polemics as well.[62] Ironically, they see a Western preoccupation in this fight. The anthropologist Warren Shapiro claims to have been a critic of the 'new kinship studies' for decades and to follow in Schneider's footsteps. He includes Sahlins' recent book among the new kinship studies.[63] Shapiro accuses these studies of creating a false 'West/Rest' dichotomy as regards kinship.[64] He refutes the dichotomy by an 'extensionist argument' as regards kinship ('Extensionism', 191) based on ethnographic material. This material shows, according to Shapiro, that not only in the West, but also in many non-Western settings kinship ideas are in fact '*grounded* in native appreciations of procreation' and are extended from this base to 'other areas of experience' ('What Human Kinship Is', 140). Shapiro explains the new kinship studies' insensitivity to these ethnographic facts by the label some of them claim for themselves – that is, of a branch of deconstructionist ways of thinking.[65] According to Shapiro, the suspicion against Western

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[62] Sahlins' book was preceded by two smaller articles in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (17/1 (2011): 2–19; 17/2 (2011): 227–42) that contain the thrust of his later book. Warren Shapiro was the first to react to it in the form of a two-page comment in the same journal (Warren Shapiro, 'Extensionism and the Nature of Kinship', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18/1 (2012): 191–3). It was followed two years later by a long article (Warren Shapiro, 'Contesting Marshall Sahlins on Kinship', *Oceania* 84/1, (2014): 19–37). The earlier brief comment was followed by two brief reactions by Sahlins himself ('Birth Is the Metaphor', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18/3 (2012): 673–7), and by Bree Blakeman ('Yolŋu Kinship and the Case for Extensionism: A Reply to Warren Shapiro', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18/3 (2012): 681–3). The former article is, in fact, a two-page quotation from Sahlins' book – that is, precisely the passage on the metaphor character of birth. Apparently, Sahlins' vehement polemics against the prevalence of the biologistic views did not cause much uproar within anthropology. This makes one wonder even more about the precise front against which Sahlins is fighting. In 2013, a 'Book Symposium' in a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* was dedicated to Sahlins' book with brief reactions by ten anthropologists, a minority of which oppose Sahlins' views (*HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3/2 (2013): 245–316). Sahlins reacted to this symposium in the next issue (3/3, 333–47).

[63] For the references to his earlier work, see Warren Shapiro, 'What Human Kinship Is Primarily About: Toward a Critique of the New Kinship Studies', *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 16/2 (2008): 137–53, at 138n3. For Sahlins' relation to 'new kinship studies', see Shapiro, 'Extensionism', 191.

[64] Shapiro, 'What Human Kinship Is', 140.

[65] Shapiro ('What Human Kinship Is', 137–8) refers to work from Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (1995), Suzan McKinnon (1995a, 2000, 2001, 2005a) and Franklin and McKinnon, *Relative Values*.

bias inherent in this position has been amplified by a Marxist preoccupation favouring collectivist views over against individualist ones.[66] As regards kinship, this results in downplaying the importance of the nuclear family and procreative relations and interest in the prevalence of extended or performative views of kinship.

The philosopher Robert A. Wilson recently criticised in particular the post-Schneiderian idea that anthropology has liberated itself from the old bio-essentialist views of kinship that resulted from a Western bias.[67] Wilson calls this idea of a 'radical juncture' 'a kind of anthropological myth' because, in the actual practice of kinship research in both Western and non-Western settings, 'the biological facts that anchor kinship terminologies and concepts across all cultures' have not been abandoned ('Kinship Past', 573). The myth results from a projection of Western views. This projection concerns the Western family 'experimentations' of the 1960s and 1970s towards 'an extended or loosened concept of relatedness' and away from traditional patterns and roles presented as founded in biology. These developments resulted in a switch in anthropological terminology from 'kinship' to 'relatives' and 'relatedness'. This loosened concept was found to have existed all along in non-Western cultures.

Although Shapiro and Wilson try to analyse the suggested anthropological paradigm shift from a distance, their analyses also show that they are part of the polemics themselves. Shapiro's tone, in particular, is sometimes even more polemical than Sahlins', and his conclusions are much more sweeping than well-balanced, detailed analyses.[68] It is difficult to

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[66] Shapiro, 'What Human Kinship Is', 148–9; 'Contesting Marshall Sahlins', 33. Shapiro does not give any explicit quotations from Friedrich Engels or other Marxist thinkers, but provides generalisations like 'the other main factor that distances many of the new kinship scholars from their own ethnographic materials is a commitment to Marxist theory, especially the hopelessly antiquated fantasies of Engels (1972[1884]) on the origin and development of the family' ('What Human Kinship Is', 148). More detailed references to Engels are found elsewhere: Warren Shapiro, 'A (P)lot of Marxist Crop: A Review Article', *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 35/1 (2009): 123–41; Warren Shapiro, 'Anti-family Fantasies in "Cutting-Edge" Anthropological Kinship Studies', *Academic Questions* 25/3 (2012): 394–402.

[67] Robert A. Wilson, 'Kinship Past, Kinship Present: Bio-essentialism in the Study of Kinship', *American Anthropologist* 118/3 (2016): 570–84.

[68] See in particular Shapiro ('Anti-family Fantasies' and 'What Human Kinship Is'), who attacks Susan McKinnon, in particular her chapter 'On Kinship and Marriage: A Critique of the Genetic and Gender Calculus of Evolutionary Psychology', in *Complexities: Beyond Nature and Nurture*, ed. by Susan McKinnon and Sydel Silverman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 106–31. Robert Parkin characterises the latter article as sometimes 'pure polemics' ('What Shapiro and McKinnon Are All About, and Why Kinship Still Needs Anthropologists', *Social Anthropology/ Anthropologie Sociale* 17/2 (2009): 158–70, at 167). The former, however, is even more vehemently in style with, for example, its characterisation of the new kinship studies as 'the most startling display of scholarly incompetence in evidence within the academy' ('Anti-family Fantasies', 396) and of those

determine whether Shapiro has any companions in this battle, although he does give some references to others.[69] Without accepting their analyses as correct, Shapiro and Wilson are helpful in drawing attention to the context in which this anthropological debate takes place. This setting reveals that more is at stake than 'just' methodological issues of doing away with a Western bias in order to do justice to the diversity of the kinship practices. In the Western context, kinship is a controversial issue. It is experienced as changing in particular as regards its natural character. The controversy is about whether these are changes for the better. Anthropologists of the 'new kinship studies' clearly welcome the developments away from an understanding of kinship in natural terms and regard the 'traditional' views that stick to it as mistaken. Kinship has always been a cultural construct. By pointing out this context, Shapiro and Wilson also throw light on why the struggle against the biological views is not yet regarded as settled after more than thirty years of anthropological arguments against them. The controversy on how current Western family life should be valued is not over. Is it to be characterised as loosened due to an individualist view of being human? If so, is this a development to be favoured or not? The critics of the new kinship studies are helpful in making aware of this controversy. On the other hand, they also continue it. Shapiro and Wilson again draw attention to the biological character of kinship over against an understanding as 'made' or 'constructed'. Thus, the debate may continue on and on because each position clearly has its flaws.

This unsettled character of the anthropological debate again confirms the difficulty of making sense of what family might mean. In the so-called new kinship studies, there is much more sensitivity to this difficulty than in the ethical studies of Almond and Browning which favour the language of the natural. There is no hidden assumption that it is somehow obvious what kinship means, and what its most representative examples are. There is an openness to all kinds of family forms and even an interest in the less common forms. The difficulty of formulating what family might mean is, however, analysed as primarily the result of inappropriate scientific methodology and terminology. The difficulty is regarded as, to use Marcel's terms, a problem rather than a mystery. As we discovered, however, the new, supposedly more adequate terminology does not solve the problem

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who practise it as mostly women who 'in their numerous self-congratulatory essays . . . call attention to the connections among their (hopelessly mistaken) analyses, "radical" feminism, and the all-female collective' (398).

[69] Shapiro ('What Human Kinship Is', 137–8) refers to Adam Kuper (1999), Mary Patterson (2005), and Akitoshi Shimizu (1991).

but leads to impasses. While emphasising that kinship is a construct, it is unable to make sense of the persistence of the language of the natural in the Western experiences of kinship, even in the context of reproductive technology or of the prevalence of birth language in non-Western settings in which kinship is all but a biological relationship. This 'unfitting language' clearly has the connotation of some kind of givenness. The problematic character of expressing givenness in terms of what is natural has come to light in our analyses, also thanks to the anthropological criticism. This does not mean, however, that it is not important to make sense of the experiences of kinship which this unfitting language expresses. This making sense must be developed in a reflection that goes beyond the opposition of what is 'given' to what is 'made', and thus beyond an opposition between nature and culture. In that sense, the moments of impasse are again fruitful in pointing to the need of a different kind of language and reflection.

The anthropological debate confirms that the experience of family as somehow given is not easy to acknowledge in our time: the anthropologists prefer to focus on the unfitting character of its expressions and do not elaborate on the experiences behind it. On the other hand, the ethnographic material offers ample expressions that stimulate a creative rethinking of givenness in categories not taken from biology or the sciences. In the final section, we take up these stimulating impulses and relate them to our earlier reflections on a balanced way of approaching the given character of family instigated by Rembrandt's Kassel painting and Koschorke's interpretation of the Holy Family. Our aim is to arrive at a different understanding of givenness, beyond the dichotomy of nature and culture. It is here that the notion of mystery may again prove its value.

Conclusion: Family as a 'Strong Image' and Taking Givenness Actively

We introduced Rembrandt as an artist who consciously portrays the Holy Family in an everyday scene. This form of expression raises questions as to whether it domesticates the holy or glorifies the everyday. From this perspective, the entire artistic topos of the Holy Family can be seen as risky, oscillating between these two dangers. A different approach beyond this opposition opens, however, when taking into account precisely the tension created in the image by means of the painted frame and curtain. Koschorke's analysis of the Holy Family gives another impulse to an alternative view. He points at the Holy Family's character of a religious

symbol, which creates a new, in-between sphere between the holy and the profane or everyday. Such symbols express a connection of the sacred and the everyday in a different way than either domestication or glorification do. They do not fix the ordinary or the given as good but both take it seriously and invite to a creative rethinking. They point to the spiritual depth of the ordinary and thus inspire new meanings. In line with this view, the topos of the Holy Family need not be conceived of as suspended between the two dangers. This alternative, balanced path is relevant to our theme of givenness. For in the ethical reflections that highlight the given nature of family, we have seen similar dangers. In Browning's view of family as natural, religious symbols of relationships are hardly analysed for their specific meanings, but are interpreted as entirely in line with 'what works best'. In Almond, the dominant view of the natural as obvious fact left sacred meanings out of the picture. The latter was not the case in the anthropological views of Sahlins, but here the resistance against biologism left hardly any room for the idea of givenness. Now we have analysed different constructive and critical reflections on the given character of family, we return to the image with which we started. We will now approach it by means of an image theory that focusses precisely on the basic question of the specific character of the image. This will help us to elaborate on what alternatives Rembrandt's *Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain* may reveal for our interpretation of the givenness of family.

Gottfried Boehm's 'Strong Image': The Importance of Not Obscuring the Boundaries of the Image

The art historian and philosopher Gottfried Boehm focusses in his image theory on the question 'What is an image?'[70] Boehm is critical of two widespread ways of looking at images. First of all, there is the idea of the image as a *copy* (*Abbild*) of reality. As a copy, the image is nothing more than a secondary, empty depiction of reality, an illustration of speech ('Wiederkehr der Bilder', 16, 33). This is the way the image is presented

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[70] Boehm's image theory reflects on the so-called iconic turn in philosophy, a revaluation of the image and imagination since the 1990s partly initiated by Boehm himself. He underlines the importance of this turn, but he also scrutinises it critically, for it is not just any attention to the image itself that will make the iconic turn a substantial paradigm shift in philosophy that strengthens the image. Gottfried Boehm, 'Die Wiederkehr der Bilder', in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm (Munich: W. Fink, 1994), 11–38; Gottfried Boehm, 'Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder', in *Iconic Turn: Die neue Macht der Bilder*, ed. by Christa Maar and Hubert Burda (Cologne: DuMont, 2004), 28–43.

in the modern 'reproduction industry' (35), which is but one example of what is to be regarded as the 'historically most influential and widespread image practice' ('Jenseits der Sprache', 35). Second, the reproductive approach is intensified in the postmodern view in which the difference between image and reality disappears ('Wiederkehr der Bilder', 35). Here, the image is a *simulation* of reality in service to an 'illusionism' (12). Boehm acutely points out that these views – and corresponding applications of image – are, in the end, *iconoclastic* (12, 16). The 'simulation' approach overstrains the image, while the idea of 'copy' enfeebles it. This criticism reveals the normative character of Boehm's question of what an image is. He is looking for a certain type of image – that is, a non-iconoclast image. Images themselves include the options of either an image-friendly strengthening of the power of the image or an image-hostile neglect or erosion of it ('Wiederkehr der Bilder', 34f.). Boehm is thus on the lookout for criteria for the image-friendly or 'strong image'.

Boehm's search for the 'strong image' resonates with our investigation of the givenness of family. His struggle to get beyond the views of images as copy or simulation parallels our aim to get beyond the opposition of nature and culture, or given and made. The 'copy' view is found in the under-standing of family as a natural relationship, in particular in its ethical elaboration that regards what is biologically given as good. On the other hand, the 'simulation' view regards family as a cultural construct. In this view, the experience of givenness does not have a legitimate place.

In order to understand what a 'strong image' may be, Boehm parallels the image 'in its true sense' to the metaphor that is part of language ('Wiederkehr der Bilder', 27ff.). 'Like the metaphor, the image is ambiguous, open to different interpretations at the same time, which cannot be summarised or paraphrased in a single expression. Nor, like the metaphor, can the image be dissected into its different elements without losing its power.' The ambiguous and complex character prevents a definitive conclusion or interpretation and thus makes the image intrinsically open. It is precisely through this openness that the image draws in listeners, readers or viewers: it invites them to interpret and acquire its meanings. These meanings can be communicated only through the image or metaphor itself.

Boehm summarises this power by which metaphor and image create their own specific meanings as the power to 'contrast' or the 'iconic difference' (29ff.). In the case of the metaphor, this contrast is the fertile, creative way in which the different words that are put together become related and create a surveyable whole, a linguistic image that is the result of the 'specific order of the words, breaks, inversions, or leaps'. In the

metaphor, a contrast remains between the meanings of the different elements or words and the meanings of the whole; at the same time, there is a new connection between the specific elements and a heterogeneity. In a similar way, the image in the visual arts is characterised by contrast: contrast is the image's precondition. In the most general or fundamental sense, the contrast in the image is between a surveyable surface as a unity, and the different elements within this unity. Furthermore, the contrast is one of time: the simultaneous perceptibility as a surface contrasts with the successiveness on the surface (30).

It is in this contrast, or 'iconic difference', that Boehm finds the key to answering the question: 'What is an image?' The singularity of the image, its way of creating a meaning of its own, lies in this contrast. Boehm also formulates it in terms of the interplay between what is depicted and its horizon or context, the determinate and the indeterminate as present in the visual arts. By means of the contrast, the material, a 'surface smeared with paint' (31), becomes an image and creates a surplus of meaning ('Jenseits der Sprache', 41). This way of understanding the image leads to the core of what an image is and thus to a criterion for the 'strong image'. The 'strong image' opens the viewer's eyes to something (32), to new meanings that exist only in the image. It is important to point out that this happens in the act of seeing. In this act, the different aspects and the whole come together without losing their difference; the image becomes completely image (41). In line with this view, Boehm characterises the 'strong image' as one in which its image character is always visible. In contrast to what happens in the case of copies and simulations, the boundaries of the imagery are not obscured in a 'strong image'. A 'strong image' is able 'to build up the iconic tension in a controlled way and to make it visible to the viewer. It lives out of precisely this double truth: to show something, also to feign something and at the same time to demonstrate the criteria and premises of this experience'.[71]

Perhaps we can summarise this character of the true image as 'honest'. The 'strong image' shows its character as image honestly and does not pretend to be an exact duplicate of the phenomenal world (copy) or completely equal to it with no difference between fact and fiction (simulation). The true image does not invite the viewer to submerge him- or

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[71] 'Von diesen neuen Techniken [Photographie, Film, Videokunst] einen bildstärkenden Gebrauch zu machen, setze freilich voraus, die ikonische Spannung kontrolliert aufzubauen und dem Betrachter sichtbar werden zu lassen. Ein starkes Bild lebt aus eben dieser doppelten Wahrheit: etwas zu zeigen, auch etwas vorzutäuschen und zugleich die Kriterien und Prämissen dieser Erfahrung zu demonstrieren' ('Wiederkehr der Bilder', 35).

herself in the painting and forget about its image character. Rather, it incites the viewer to interpret the image, to become the location of the creation of new meanings by looking at it and being aware of one's viewing of the painting.

Rembrandt's Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain *as a 'Strong Image'*

One may easily present, as we saw, Rembrandt's paintings of the Holy Family as outstanding examples of the aforementioned *Verdiesseitigung* of the critical teaching of the Gospels and a veneration of the natural family. The presence of the curtain and frame in the Kassel version, however, calls to mind Boehm's thesis of the contrast or 'iconic difference' constitutive of the 'strong image'. Here, we seem to have a painting in which the boundaries of the image are anything but obscured: they are emphasised by the curtain and frame.[72] As a result, one becomes aware of one's position as a viewer of the painting. Can this painting therefore be called a 'strong image' that works in the double sense of 'showing' something and 'demonstrating the premises of its showing'? Two aspects of Boehm's theory in particular may deepen our understanding of the Kassel painting and its relevance for an alternative understanding of givenness.

First, its 'strong image' character may lie in the fact that the viewer is not tempted to become completely absorbed in the painting so that the difference between image and reality evaporates. The moment the viewer is inclined to become submerged in the apparent domestic idyll and forget about its image character, the frame and curtain prevent this by an estranging move that makes one aware of one's own viewing and interpreting position. This is not a copy of reality; it is an image. The frame and curtain, the explicit boundaries of the painting, also estrange the viewer from the scene itself: what is that we see here, a recognisable moment of everyday life, or one that is usually hidden, or a new reality called into being by the painting? This double estrangement could give rise to the question: why is this purely common scene worthy of being painted and viewed as

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[72] In the Holy Family painting with the angels, Haverkamp-Begemann sees a dark edge along the bottom of the painting that was enlarged later. It makes it look like a space before the floor: the floor ends abruptly (*Rembrandt*, 20). According to Haverkamp-Begemann, similar demarcations of spaces are found only in Rembrandt's religious works, even when they do not seem 'entirely logical or practical' for the composition as such. He explains them as conferring special value upon the space in which the scene takes place and indicating that this is not our world, but that of the specific biblical scene.

a painting? This question may arise in particular as images of the profane family in a domestic setting were not a well-known theme in Rembrandt's time.[73] Thus, via the Holy Family, the common life receives unexpected attention. It is worthy of being contemplated as representing the holy. Does this mean, though, that everyday family life is idealised, even religiously sanctioned in these paintings? No, it may be shocking that the ordinary is worthy of being painted at all and, furthermore, worthy of representing the holy.

If we translate this aspect to our issue of givenness, the Kassel Holy Family may be said to invite us to view the ordinary as given. The viewer is invited to ponder on the deeper meanings of this aspect of our life, of being a family. The viewer is put in the mode or attitude of descrying deeper meanings in reality or of taking the experience of such meanings seriously. It does so, however, without making the ordinary something good as such. Givenness as it is discovered in Rembrandt's 'strong image' of the Holy Family is not about the unalterable 'facts of life' that are proven to 'work best', but about the ways in which the holy or life as mystery can be traced in common aspects of life as it presents itself to people. Painting the Holy Family as an ordinary one definitely means intense attention to the ordinary family that is represented. It is precisely in this everyday family that the sacred is revealed, but family is not as such sacred or good. Rather, it surprises or even shocks that it is possible to bring the ordinary and the divine together. It raises questions. Here we arrive at the second aspect.

The second relevant aspect of the 'strong image' is that it cannot be explained or translated completely into words, but speaks for itself in its own image-like way. It preserves the iconic 'contrast' or 'difference': the impressiveness of the sober family scene and the estranging effect of the curtain. This is the main contrast that, according to Rembrandt, is suited to letting the viewer imagine the Holy Family. As such, it stimulates interpretation and reflection. This interpretation may start from a certain recognition the painting evokes by the common, familiar character of the scene: I may suddenly see myself or my own children in the cradle, myself as a parent, as well as my own parents watching over me. Thus, the painting may touch on the experiences of the viewer, experiences of intimacy, care and attention that have or have not been present in one's own family. It may give cause to wonder about the fact that Christian belief honours a God who has become human in such a way that God also needed this care and was dependent upon others. The painting incites one to

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[73] Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt*, 13, referring to Frans Floris' *Holy Family* (1550/60).

contemplate the incarnation, the idea that everyday human reality is the place where Christ was born, that Christ could be lying in our cradle. Rembrandt invites us to reflect on, even to experience oneself, how the *Diesseits* (this-worldly) may display a *Jenseits* (a beyond), where perfectly common facts reveal deeper meanings. The contrast that remains visible in the painting thus invites to interpret the ordinary as somehow given without fixing this givenness.

Taking Family as a 'Strong Image' in Order to Account for Givenness as Mystery

Understanding Rembrandt's Kassel painting as a 'strong image' thus helps to formulate a different sense of givenness, beyond the obvious dangers. This 'strong image' invites the viewer to regard or experience the ordinary family as meaningful without fixing this meaning. Viewing this painting may make one aware of other experiences of family as given. These experiences reveal this aspect of life, this phenomenon, as meaningful, or even as having a surplus of meaning, something that must be taken seriously. But this taking seriously, and this surplus of meaning, is not something the family embodies in a definitive sense. Taking family as given should be done in such a way that the image character is preserved. The family is an image of a deeper meaning, but it is not itself, as such, this deeper meaning. This experience of givenness happens in the act of seeing, in a moment. Taking these moments as experiences of givenness means accepting the invitation which they embody to be put one in the mode or attitude of descrying a deeper meaning in the ordinary. This attitude may be associated with Marcel's catching 'a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life'.

This interpretation of givenness raises the question of whether givenness has any special relation to the phenomenon of family. Can other aspects of human life not also be an invitation to discover deeper meanings in a similar way? By approaching the family as a phenomenon that confronts us in our time with the given side of life, we do not claim that it is unique in doing so. On the other hand, it is not by chance that at present this givenness is discovered precisely in the family. The family is a phenomenon that pre-eminently embodies what may be called a structure of life. Despite their enormous variety, family relations share a character of shaping or ordering life. This order usually feels like an order that presents itself to people, not an order that one must first shape or build from scratch. In this sense, one may even call human beings 'family beings', although this is only

one aspect of their being human. But what does it mean to be a 'family being'? The family confronts people with the idea that life is structured and not completely open and without form. It is not by chance that kinship has, from the very first studies, attracted the attention of anthropologists who want to understand foreign cultures. It is not far-fetched to see a structure in kinship that may be comparable between cultures. Thus, family confronts one pre-eminently with what we called earlier the 'other side of freedom', and thereby puts one on the track of givenness. At least, that is what family confronts us with in our peculiar Western setting in which givenness has become a difficult notion due to the dominance of the perspective of free choice.

A second reason why precisely the family puts us on this track of givenness seems to lie in what Marcel called its embodiment of the human bond with life. It is the site where new life may appear and where life is passed on. Through the possibility of having children, a couple is placed in a sphere greater than just the two of them. Family is a setting that puts people in relation to ancestors and future descendants, and thus life can be experienced as stretching beyond oneself. Family can remind one of being a child of others and can thus make one experience life as a gift to be respected. Family is a sphere that people do not primarily experience as something arranged by themselves, but as something that opens up, that is there, given. Perhaps this is why Rembrandt prefers the scene of the family with their young child. In particular, when new life comes into being, the bond with life itself may be experienced.

These interpretations of family as given may finally be summarised and specified by relating them to the character of the family as mystery. First, experiencing family as given is now understood as implying a specific attitude. It is the attitude of approaching the world as not only a 'matter of fact', but also, at certain moments, in certain phenomena, as mystery. This attitude implies that reality is taken utterly seriously. It takes reality as hiding a deeper meaning which goes beyond it but is nevertheless traced in it. Thus, the ordinary becomes an image of something greater, which may even have connotations of the sacred. Experiencing givenness means becoming a viewer of this 'strong image', and thus feeling invited or even urged to descry a 'beyond' or a 'depth'. Experiencing this givenness thus implies an active attitude. This attitude takes on moral weight in that it determines how people take their place within this world, what they regard as their responsibilities and tasks. If one takes the world as given in this sense, one does not think of oneself as acting from nowhere, or primarily on the basis of one's own decisions. Givenness, then, is about trying to

fathom the situation, life as it is, the people by whom one is surrounded down to their deeper meanings, the appeal hidden in them. These meanings or appeal incite one to act in a way that takes them into account. However – and this is the second point – givenness does not mean that this acting in answer to the appeal is fixed and clear. Its character as mystery again emphasises this. The active attitude presupposed in experiencing givenness means that one still has to find out how one will answer this invitation to find a deeper meaning. Family is a 'strong image' in that it makes us attentive to mystery and invites to creative interpretations of this dimension. Trying to find one's own interpretation of the appeals or invitations family embodies is taking it seriously as given.

Our analyses of the ethical and anthropological views of family show that both of these aspects are difficult to deal with in our time. In the anthropological debate, we discovered the strong resonance of the view of family as something that is not steady, inflexible or fixed. The view of family as something set and unalterable evokes strong opposition. This sensitive character of the givenness of family shows that something is at stake in it. It is difficult to make sense of the experiences of givenness in the light of obvious ideals of individual freedom and the autonomy of choice. The overreaction in the polemical anthropological stances on the issue of the suggested naturalness of family seems understandable from this sensitivity of the topic. The ethical approaches to family as natural, on the other hand, bring to light the opposite reaction. If one does give room to the idea of family as given, this easily results in the desire to fix its givenness. The language of the natural is then used to claim the obviousness of the good of the intact, so-called biological family. It is underpinned by references to facts with the status of being scientifically proven. This way of dealing with the given side of life does not invite creative interpretations of what the family tie might mean in each concrete situation. It is rather concerned with stating the givenness. Both ways of solving the difficulty of experiences of family as given lack an awareness of its character as mystery.

In analysing the different ethical and anthropological positions, however, we also found opposing tendencies in all of them that do not fit completely into these dominant ways of thinking and lead to impasses. There are reflections in all of them that display a certain awareness of the character of the givenness of family as mystery, of the difficulty of naming what givenness might mean. Almond acknowledges this unnameability at certain moments, even though they are not well integrated into her argument. Browning struggles with the specificity of religious symbols and their value in understanding what family might mean. Strathern and

Franklin bring to light the persistence of the language of the natural. Strangely enough, the most constructive elaboration of this character of mystery is found in Sahlins, despite his fierce polemics with the view of family as fixed by biology or procreation. He highlights new concepts to make sense of the kinship practices he finds in ordinary life. His elaboration of kinship as 'mutuality of being' points out the intense, intimate sharing of life that characterises kinship. Terms like 'mystical interdependence' and the examples of kin who 'immediately feel' each other's experiences also recall the analyses of Butler and Ciavatta. In Chapter 4, we deal with the question of whether it is possible to further specify what this inextricable sharing of each other's life among family members means concretely by understanding how dependence is at stake in the sphere of family.

Family and Dependence as Mystery

In Chapter 1, we introduced the theme of dependence to characterise relationships among family members. As such, dependence can serve as a specification of the givenness of family. Together, the terms 'givenness' and 'dependence' were chosen as keys that could be helpful in unlocking current controversies about family and understanding what is at stake in them. Family relations confront people with the difficulty of the non-chosen side of life. In Chapter 3, we explored this controversial character of givenness, particularly what is at stake in current debates on family as either 'nature' or 'culture'. In the impasses to which too strong an emphasis on either of these aspects leads, we discovered the need to get beyond them and develop an alternative view of givenness. Constructive impulses to such alternative views were traced in the first evocations of givenness in relation to Rembrandt and the topos of the Holy Family. The creative, balanced way of becoming aware of moments of experiencing givenness was further developed by means of Boehm's concept of the 'strong image'. Family could be a 'strong image' that does not hide its character as image. Thus, it reveals a surplus of meaning and invites the viewer to 'experience givenness'. As a relationship in which people first of all find themselves and which as such is a characteristic of human life that one does not actively determine, family is a pre-eminent setting in which to experience givenness in this new sense. What is more, it is a setting in which people witness the appearance of new life or ponder the miracle of their own. This invites people to regard life as more than a fact, to descry a deeper meaning in it. It is a setting where one experiences life as a gift that incites reverence. We related this to what Marcel calls the sacred 'bond with life itself'. In the setting of family, people might be brought into contact with life itself, feel the appeal to take life seriously. This gives a certain status to family, as a result of which it can figure as a scene that evokes the sacred, as in Rembrandt's paintings. This status does not mean, however, that family as such is a good and that people experience

life itself simply by living in a family. Nor does just any painting of a family scene imply an invitation to this kind of givenness. It is as a 'strong image' that the scene invites the viewer to reflect on the ordinary. As such, it might bring the viewers into the active mode of taking life as they find it seriously and answering it. This activity is a creative one of finding one's own answer to the appeal implied in the moment of givenness.

    With this understanding of givenness, we are at a quite general level of reflection on what family might mean, which does not go into concrete acts. This level is crucial to understanding what is at stake in the theme of family in our time, as we have seen. Moreover, the openness with respect to the concrete acting is deliberate. For we noticed that moral reflection is not stimulated when, as in the case of Almond and Browning, givenness is taken as the act of living in a family or keeping it intact, sanctioned by its 'natural' character. An alternative understanding of givenness is needed that incorporates the moment of being stimulated or challenged to reflect on a deeper meaning of reality, beyond its factual existence. We pointed out that the experience of givenness asks for an answer and therefore presupposes an active attitude. This acting should start from the moment of taking life seriously to the level of experiencing a surplus of meaning. What precisely should one take seriously in the case of family? The theme of dependence was introduced in Chapter 1 with an eye to exploring this question. We tried to introduce this theme with words that make explicit the neutral sense in which we would like to use it: 'intertwinement', 'entanglement' or 'interwovenness'. An initial description of dependence was formulated as somehow implied in each other's identity. In the accounts of the anthropologists, particularly Sahlins, we found many similar expressions from different cultural settings. Family members are part of who people are, for better or for worse. They share each other's situation or fate in intense ways.

    In relation to Hegel, in Chapter 2, we saw that Butler also draws attention to the importance of discussing in ethics the level of a fundamental dependence on others and on living processes. Life is interdependent, and dependence on other human beings is constitutive of being a person. However, Butler emphasises, this dependence is hard to understand. It is important to recognise its opaque character, also in ethical reflection – an insight we related to our mystery approach. With this insight, however, we have not yet gauged what exactly the constructive role of ethical reflection can be in fathoming what action takes this dependence into account. Ethics aims to give insight into the good life,

into what we should do. Therefore, we have to explore further what this dependence might mean and how much light we can shed on it given its opaque and mysterious nature – in particular because of the precarious character of any suggestion of taking life as it presents itself seriously. The criticism that this leads to resignation to the status quo, or, worse, to injustice, oppression or abuse has accompanied our investigations from the start. Something like a call to recognise one's dependent nature would clearly meet similar concerns. This is why Butler refuses to relate dependence to a specific human phenomenon and to family in particular, since this would result in missing the point of its contingent, alterable or political nature. We did not follow Butler's denial of the importance of reflecting on family and, with the help of Hegel and Ciavatta, discovered a specific complexity that comes to light when investigating family as a distinct moral sphere.

In this chapter, we will continue this investigation of family as a distinct phenomenon and ask whether it can substantiate the issue of what dependence might mean and what its importance for moral reflection might be. We explore this question in line with our final thoughts in Chapter 3 on the image character of family. What moral impulses could family generate, if it is seen as a 'strong image'? We discussed the balanced ways in which givenness should be approached in relation to family. Does this balancing have enough critical potential to avoid the obvious risks? Our aim in this chapter is thus also to find out whether the active attitude implied in our understanding of givenness can be elaborated by means of the notion of dependence. Finally, our reflection on dependence should serve the aim of understanding the controversial status of family. As became clear in Butler's reflections, dependence is an important issue in current moral reflection, also because of a dissatisfaction with the view of human beings as independently and freely shaping their lives from scratch. There are many pleas, especially in the field of care ethics, to constructively incorporate dependence into moral reflection. However, as we will see, in these pleas, family is not the obvious setting for examining dependency in an open, basic and neutral sense. Family comes into play primarily because of the distortions of dependency. We will examine a selection of recent voices to see why family is viewed in this negative way, but also to see what these reflections on dependence can constructively contribute to a further specification of the experience of givenness in the context of family.

We will start our investigation, as in the foregoing chapters, by evoking our central theme from a different literary source. In order to keep the image character alive, we will again turn to a figurative presentation of family, one that comes to us not in a painting, but in a text. The image is

evoked in a very particular way – that is, by representing it as lived, embodied in the lives of real people. Moreover, this lived image is immediately introduced as critical: it should change the viewers. Family is imagined as a harsh judgement of the status quo. Therefore, it seems particularly relevant to our aim of creating an understanding of family with sufficient critical potential to withstand the aforementioned risks of resignation to the status quo. We find this lived image in the biblical book of the prophet Hosea.

Hosea's Lived Image of an Adulterous Family

It is remarkable that family-related imagery is often used in the Bible to express the relationship between God and believers. The relationship with the divine is depicted as one between lovers, or a parent–child relationship or a mixture of both. To call God a father, or to think of God as a husband and of the believer as a wife or child clearly differs from regarding God as king, lawgiver or lord and believers as subjects or servants. In Hosea, this family imagery abounds. Our focus will be on chapters 1, 2 and 11, in which both relationships between husband and wife and parents and children figure.[1] The family tie is far from undisputed in these chapters of Hosea. The good family relationship and life are contrasted to unfaithfulness and fornication or adultery. The family tie is something the believers are reminded of by the prophet; they have lost sight of it. We find thus another example of how the family tie becomes visible precisely under pressure. Moreover, the meanings of family highlighted in the text will turn out to include a constructive and critical view of dependence.

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[1] In the exegetical literature, Hosea chapters 1–3 are usually distinguished from chapters 4–14. From the fourth chapter onwards, Hosea is mostly concerned with the charge of fornication and the announcement of God's wrath. Here, Israel's adultery and God's wrath and punishment are only now and then painted in terms related to marriage imagery, in particular childbearing (9:14b,16b; 14:13, 16b). For the most part, fornication is here indicated in general terms or with references to idolatry or injustice. Opinions vary on whether Hosea is a textual unity. Jörg Jeremias argues that Hosea 1–3 is a separate section with a common theme (Jörg Jeremias, 'Hosea in the Book of the Twelve', in *The Book of the Twelve: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Jakob Wöhrle (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 111–23, at 112). At first sight, such a theme is less clear in the next section, chapters 4–11. Yet the majority of scholars regard this as 'the nucleus of the prophetic book' (113) and as a unity. Although the topics seem different at first sight, they in fact presuppose each other and cannot be understood independently (115). Chapters 12–14 are a separate unity with a clear relation to the foregoing section (113). Gerald Morris, however, observes the use of similar verbs throughout the entire book of Hosea which together constitute a lyric poem. In his view, Hosea 1–3 serves as an introduction that is elaborated in the rest of the book. Hosea 14 serves as a conclusion in which many words from the introduction recur (Gerald Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 114–15).

Hosea's Family as an Image of a Relationship, Its Denial, Its Endangerment and Its Restoration

For understanding Hosea, it is crucial to see that the family is here deliberately used as an image. The prophet's task is to become a living image. This task is announced right at the start of the book: '[T]he LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD"' (1:2).[2] Hosea's starting a family with an unfaithful woman should serve as an image for Israel's unfaithfulness to God.[3] This divine call is peculiar and raises several questions. Why does Hosea need to live the image in his own family life and thus duplicate Israel's unfaithfulness? Why is it not enough for Hosea to speak up and to accuse the Israelites of adultery in plain language? Moreover, how can a promiscuous family life that evidently violates divine laws be a divine calling? Will this concrete living out at the micro level of a concrete family communicate anything about Israel's fornication at the macro level? Is this image not too small-scale and trivial to draw the attention of the observers and affect them? Moreover, given the promiscuity so central to the story, will people simply not take offence at such lived imagery – particularly as it is lived by a prophet, a person 'to whom the word of the LORD came' (1:1)? To reflect on these questions, we first need a better impression of what the unfaithfulness is about and how it relates to family.

Hosea is called not just to marry a woman, but expressly to have children with her. Remarkably, this woman and the children are all characterised from the outset as adulterous.[4] Contrary to what one would expect, the

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[2] References in the text are taken from the New International Version (NIV) but mention the numbering of the verses used in the Hebrew Bible (Stuttgartensia). In the Hebrew Bible, chapter 2 starts two verses earlier than in the NIV, 12:1–14 is numbered 12:2–15 and 14:1–9 is numbered 14:2–10. Within a different framework an analysis of Hosea as well as the interpretation of Alice A. Keefe (discussed later in this chapter) can be found in my article: 'The Embodied Character of "Acknowledging God": A Contribution to Understanding the Relationship between Transcendence and Embodiment on the Basis of Hosea', in *Embodied Religion*, Ars Disputandi Supplement Series, Vol. 6, ed. by Peter Jonkers and Marcel Sarot (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2013), 47–70.

[3] First, the adultery of the wife is paralleled to that of the 'land'. It is hard to clarify the differences in meaning between the unfaithfulness of Israel as land, wife or mother, and children; they are inextricably intertwined (cf. Katrin Keita, *Gottes Land: Exegetische Studien zur Land-Thematik im Hoseabuch in kanonischer Perspektive* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007), 55–6; Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, *Imagery in the Prophecy of Hosea, Ägypten und Altes Testament* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 145–6).

[4] The NIV translation does not show that in Hosea 1:2 the Hebrew root for adultery, *znh* / זנה, is used in reference not just to the woman, but also to the children. *znh* / זנה means committing adultery or fornication in the sense of being unfaithful in a marriage, but also in the sense of prostitution or being a harlot. It is often used in the Bible, especially in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to indicate Israel's apostasy and unfaithfulness. Hosea, however, is called to take a 'woman of fornications' and also 'children of fornications'. These expressions are found only in Hosea and are not the usual designations

adultery itself is not described. There is no contrast at first with an earlier situation of an unaffected, faithful family life. Because the wife and children both figure as a lived image of adultery, family figures prominently in this text from the start. The focus is not on the married couple, as seems obvious in the case of adultery. Rather, this family emerges as an adulterous family, although this is not said of Hosea himself. By presenting the family both as one of 'official' marriage and ordinary childbirth and as one of adultery, a diffuse image arises. This is an odd family when compared to usual standards. This diffuse and provocative character may seem detrimental to the communicative power of the image. The concreteness of the lived, real existence of the family, however, does seem to make the image inescapable, something viewers must take into account. Its meanings are not clear-cut and univocal. As such, the image challenges and seems to aim at a creative re-imagination of an actual relationship with God.

The verses following the divine call to form an adulterous family do not go, as one may expect, into the adultery, but focus entirely on the birth and naming of the children. The woman's name is mentioned – Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. The text continues by only speaking about the children. They are introduced briefly as 'conceived and born'. Subsequently, Hosea is commanded to give each of them a name. The names are presented as given intentionally by the Lord: they have a specific meaning, which is immediately revealed by the divine mandator. The explanations of the names all concern punishment of the people of Israel. They do not give clear insight into why the Israelites are being punished. Only the name of the first child gives a hint as to Israel's transgression. It is a son called Jezreel because God will 'punish the house of Jehu for the massacre' Israel committed at Jezreel (1:4). The second is a daughter called Lo-Ruhamah, which is explained as saying: God 'will no longer show love to Israel' (1:6). The third, another son, is called Lo-Ammi, 'for you are not my people' (1:9). The names thus reveal God's negative responses to certain indefinite wrongs committed by Israel in a time before the coming into existence of this family. These responses are punishment, no compassion,

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of prostitution. We take the translation as woman and children 'of fornications' from Alice Keefe's study on Hosea, discussed in detail later in this chapter. Koehler and Baumgartner's *Lexicon* also translates 'fornication'. Keefe argues that fornication should be distinguished from prostitution. Prostitution was a 'legal and tolerated activity in ancient Israel'. The fornication of a woman in the sense of a wife, however, implied a rupture of the social order. Although there are also references to 'professional prostitution' in Hosea, the term's translation by 'fornication' emphasises its unique character in the Bible (see Alice Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 19–21, where she refers to Phyllis Bird for this translation). We will use both 'adultery' and 'fornication'.

calling them no longer God's people. By the names of the children, the relationship between God and Israel is declared terminated.

The curious thing is that, for the children's names – especially the latter two – to have these negative meanings, a pre-existing relationship must be assumed. Although the names are explained unequivocally in a negative key, this negation presupposes something positive: Israel has been God's people, loved by God. Thus, a complex, even paradoxical image is presented. Children need to be born and named, which means that new relationships come into existence between parents and children. They are born to serve as images of a terminated relationship as soon as they receive a name. A far less complex way of announcing the termination of the relationship with Israel would be to send the children away or to leave the marriage childless. Why are real, living children needed to have it announced via their names that the relationship will end? If the relationship really no longer exists or matters, the children need not be born. Apparently, there is a relationship between God and the people which matters somehow, even though it is declared over. Again, this is an aspect of the image that is the result of its lived character.

The following verses confirm that the relationship with God still matters. The children's names, which express the termination of the relationship, turn out not to be the one and final judgement addressed to the people. In the second chapter, the text suddenly takes up the opposite turn and explicitly inverts the names of the children. It says: 'In the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they will be called "children of the living God" . . . Say of your brothers, "My people", and of your sisters, "My loved one"' (2:1, 3).[5] This unexpected continuation of the relationship despite the first naming is possible only because of the living presence of the children. They embody the fact that the relationship is not completely destroyed. A renaming is possible. The new names, freed from their earlier negative qualification, are put into the mouths of the brothers and sisters themselves. They must call each other by their new names that express their relationship to God in the first person, as if spoken from God's mouth.

This first passage (1:1–2:3) thus presents the family as a lived image of the complex relationship between God and his people, which is presupposed as both existent and violated and leads both to punishment in the form of its termination and to renewal. In all these moments, the family tie remains meaningful, despite the ending of the relationship with God announced in the first naming of the children. Apart from the general notion of adultery, the family relationship is not specified any further, however.

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[5] This reversal is repeated in Hosea 2:24–25.

God's Love for His Rebellious Child Israel

A more concrete view of what the relationship means seems to be present in the imagery of God as parent and Israel as child in Hosea 11.[6] This passage does not refer explicitly to the lived image of Hosea and Gomer and their children, but it does present God as addressing Israel, both in direct speech and in the third person. The direct speech again creates the imagery of a real living child, especially when reading it against the background of the first chapters of Hosea. The bond is emphatically depicted as stemming from God's love.[7] The chapter opens by relating Israel's childhood and God's love for the child to Israel's being called out of Egypt.[8] In the following verses, the 'upbringing' of Israel is depicted in a few brief phrases referring to everyday scenes: God teaches them to walk 'taking them by the arms', he 'heals' them (11:3) and leads them with 'cords of human kindness', with 'ties of love' and feeds them (11:4).[9]

The language of fornication or adultery is absent, but the relationship is anything but unproblematic. Israel does not respond to God's love.[10] This is presented as being so from the very beginning of the relationship. Thus, it is a parallel of the first chapter, where the woman and children figure from the start as adulterous. While we did not find any reference to a specific moment of committing adultery there, Israel's turning their back on their parent, God, is specified here in three ways.[11] First, there is religious and cultic betrayal: sacrificing to the Baals, burning incense to images (11:2), 'false prophets' (11:6) and turning from God 'even though they call me God

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[6] We use the term 'parent' because Hosea's depiction of parental love is not gendered, while this could easily have been done (Brigitte Seifert, *Metaphorisches Reden von Gott im Hoseabuch* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 200). Of course, the question of whether Hosea 11 refers to a father or mother is inspired by current interests and not Hosea's problem (201).

[7] 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son' (11:1). The root for 'love' (*'hb* / אהב) plays a central role in this chapter. This love for Israel is also mentioned in Hosea 3:1, but then in the context of the husband–wife relationship: 'The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes"'.

[8] A similar formulation is found in 2:17, referring to the husband–wife relationship: 'There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.'

[9] The translation of the final verse (11:4b) concerning this upbringing is difficult: 'To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek'; God 'bent down to feed them' (NIV). Most translations choose to draw not on the parent–child relation but on that of treating animals – for example, King James Version: 'and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws'; International Version: 'lifts the yoke from their jaws'.

[10] Israel's behaviour is summarised as: 'the more they were called, the more they went away from me' (11:2).

[11] Seifert also arrives at this threefold characterisation of Israel's reaction in Hosea 11, which she, moreover, relates to other chapters of Hosea (*Metaphorisches Reden*, 212).

Most High' (11:7). Second, Israel is said not to realise or acknowledge (*jd'* / ידע) who 'healed' them (11:3).[12] Finally there are references to turning to Egypt and Assyria – although this is described not just as a violation, but also as a punishment from God.[13] The language of love does not figure in the designations of Israel's behaviour, but it does return in the depiction of God's response. This seems at first to consist in punishment, but this announcement is immediately followed by rhetorical questions that resume the language of love: 'How can I give you up' or 'hand you over?' (11:8).[14] God says that he changes his 'heart' and will not carry out his anger (11:9), but will arrange their return from Egypt and Assyria.[15] In the depiction of this loving response, the parental character of the relationship is no longer mentioned, however. A different reason for it is given: 'For I am God, and not a man – the Holy One among you' (11:9).[16] Thus, the family tie does not figure on a more general, abstract level as, for example, an explicit rule that limits the all-too-harsh punishment for Israel's turning away. The family bond is evoked in images taken from everyday life like teaching children to walk, 'taking them by the arms' (11:3). As in the first chapter, the parent–child relationship is presented as a relationship that already exists, is denied by Israel, threatened because of deserved punishment, but in the end nevertheless restored by God.

God's Care for His 'Family' in Daily Sustenance and the Interdependence of All Life

In a similar pattern of termination and restoration, the second chapter evokes the other family relationship present in the book of Hosea, that of husband and wife. In this context, the adultery is specified for the first time. Israel is addressed via the children, as a mother, which continues the lived image introduced in the first chapter. The children should 'rebuke' their mother because she is not God's wife and he is not her husband (2:4).

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[12] The Hebrew root *rp'* / רפא means healing. It is used several times in Hosea in a general sense without specifying the illness or injuries, and with God as subject and Israel as object (6:1; 7:1), but also once with the specification of healing the Israelites' 'waywardness' (14:4), and once in a negative sense with the king of Assyria as subject (5:12).

[13] The text speaks of a 'return to Egypt' and of Assyria ruling over Israel 'because they refuse to repent' (11:5).

[14] This punishment is mentioned only briefly, in terms of a flashing sword that will devour false prophets and their plans (11:6).

[15] They will 'follow the LORD' (11:10). They will come from Egypt and Assyria – 'trembling like sparrows'. God 'will settle them in their homes' (11:11).

[16] According to Jeremias, this change should not be interpreted as regret or pity but as self-control, withdrawal of justified wrath, which is grounded only in God, not in Israel's behaviour (Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 145).

Harsh punishment for the mother is announced (2:5). Then the adultery is described by quoting the mother: 'I will go after my lovers who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my drink' (2:7). This statement is repeated indirectly a few lines later (2:10), where the woman is accused of not acknowledging that God was the one who gave her all these basic supplies of 'grain, new wine and oil', as well as 'silver and gold'. Israel's adultery is thus explained here as pertaining to the sphere of daily sustenance. No longer being spouses means no longer recognising and trusting the other as the one who provides what is needed to live and prosper. Parallel to this specification of Israel's transgression, God's punishment is depicted as consisting in drought and infertile land that will yield no basic produce (2:5, 11, 14).

After this specification of the fornication and the announcement of harsh and all-encompassing punishment in line with it, the tone of divine speech changes all of a sudden. God takes the initiative to change the situation: 'Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her' (2:16). God will lead her there not to punish her (cf. 2:5), but to give her back her vineyards (2:17).[17] The restoration of the relationship is subsequently also painted in terms similar to the ones that specified the adultery. The restoration means a flourishing of nature and being provided with sufficient produce (2:23–25a; cf. 2:10). This imagery returns in other chapters, where Israel is depicted as fruitful, as flourishing again like the grain and the vine, the blossoming lilies and the cedars with their roots and young shoots (14:5–7).[18] Even God is seen as part of this natural prosperity: he is compared to the winter and spring rains (6:3) and to 'a flourishing juniper' from which the people's fruitfulness comes (14:9b).[19] Thus, a second field of imagery is opened in this chapter by the references to the fertility of the land, the yields that form the daily sustenance of the people, and to the flourishing of nature. This imagery is interwoven with that of the lived image of Hosea's adulterous family.

The two spheres are clearly seen as in line with and complementing each other. Being a family means not just caring for and healing each other, as in

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[17] The 'leading into the wilderness' seems in line with the punishment (cf. also 12:10). Keita points out, however, that the Hebrew word *midbar* / מדבר, which means 'wilderness' or 'desert', also has the connotation of the place where Israel is 'found' and 'known, cared for' by God, as is obvious in Hosea 9:10 and 13:5 (Keita, *Gottes Land*, 242–3). Within the framework of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the desert is where Israel learns to rely entirely on God's care. It is this trust that God aims to evoke again against their adulterous dedication to other suppliers of daily sustenance.

[18] Other passages in which Israel is depicted as (bearing) fruit are Hosea 9:10, 16; 10:1, 12–13; 14:6–9.

[19] For the depiction of the situation of the restored or renewed relationship, the terminology of God as 'responding' ('*nh* / ענה) as used in 2:23–24 returns in 14:9a.

the parent–child imagery of Hosea 11, but also being reliant on the same basic supplies, the success of the same harvest. The relationship of God to believers concerns the giving of care, as a loving husband or parent does, but also the providing of that produce and the fertility of the land. This complementarity is also visible in that the announcement of the restoration of the relationship by God is depicted not just as a renewed marriage and parenthood[20] but also as a covenant 'the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground' take part in (2:20).[21] Family images are apparently not sufficient to indicate the restoration of the relationship. They are interwoven with these images of a more encompassing restoration culminating in a cosmic reciprocal 'responding' from skies to earth, to grain, new wine and oil (2:23–24). These images of a creation in which everything is in tune both expand the scope of the imagery beyond family and specify the meanings of the family images. What seems to be at stake in the concrete family is the interdependence of all life which is the basis for its flourishing. God provides the basic necessities for life to flourish (rain, food and clothing) and secures it in a covenant among all creatures, and a betrothal to Israel 'forever' 'in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion', in 'faithfulness' (2:21–22).

The intertwinement of the two kinds of imagery is also expressed in a central term used to characterise both Israel's unfaithfulness and the way

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[20] The family images used to indicate the restoration are those of becoming God's children again (2:1, 3, 25) and calling God 'my husband' and going back to him (2:9, 18). Both are described as something God accomplishes.

[21] This double imagery in the depiction of the relationship between God and his people in Hosea reminds some exegetes of the creation stories of Genesis 1–3. It is argued that a common creation tradition underlies both (cf. Keita, *Gottes Land*, 306). It paints the animals and plants as participating in God's relationship with Israel, in punishment and in the covenantal renewal. A concrete textual basis for the correspondence seems, for example, the combination 'thorns and thistles', which is found in the Bible only in the Genesis 3 passage and in Hosea 10:8: 'The high places of wickedness will be destroyed – it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars.' Michael DeRoche points out the moments in Hosea of restoration or reversal of the relationship established in the creation stories (Michael DeRoche, 'The Reversal of Creation in Hosea', *Vetus Testamentum* 31/4 (1981): 400–9). For example, the reversal of the covenant in 2:20 is announced in 4:3. Because there is no acknowledgement of God but only sins that remind of the Decalogue – that is, cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery – 'the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away' (4:3). DeRoche argues that this punishment means a reversal of creation: the order of the words 'the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea' is precisely the reversal of the order in which they are mentioned at creation (Gen. 1:20, 24) and being placed under the dominion of human beings (Gen. 1:26, 28) ('The Reversal', 403). They represent the three spheres of the 'animal kingdom', and the prophet thus announces 'a total destruction' (403). Keita mentions many other parallels, like Adam and Eve being placed in a garden and their later expulsion from it, nakedness and being clothed as expressions of God's care and punishment or the inversion of the husband–wife hierarchy of Genesis 3:16 (Keita, *Gottes Land*, 305–6, 318–20).

its people should have reacted to the love of God. This is the Hebrew root *jd'* / ידע, which indicates knowing, understanding, acknowledging, realising or noticing, and here usually has God as its object (2:10, 22; 4:1; 5:4; 6:3, 6; 8:2; 11:3; 13:4).[22] The first time the phrase 'acknowledging God' appears in Hosea, it is specified as acknowledging God as the giver of 'grain, new wine and oil' and also of 'silver and gold' (2:10). This is exactly the opposite of the fornication mentioned earlier in this chapter, which was described as chasing 'other lovers' in order to achieve these basic products (2:7). Acknowledgement thus means recognising God as the true source of wealth and sustenance, especially in the basic, daily forms of food, drink and clothing, which includes a good harvest and agricultural thriving. In Hosea 11, in the context of the parent–child imagery, *jd'* / ידע has 'healing' as its reference (11:3). In other chapters, knowing God is placed in parallel with faithfulness and love (4:1) and contrasted with 'burnt offerings' (6:6). Not knowing God is placed alongside 'prostitution in the heart' (5:4) and 'rejecting what is good' (8:3). It is also related to reminding Israel of being led out of Egypt (11:3; 13:4).[23] In sum, *jd'* / ידע indicates how Israel should express its awareness of its family relationship with God.

The Lived-Out Image of the Family as a Call to Acknowledge Dependence on God

When the divine call to form an adulterous family as a lived image of Israel's unfaithfulness is first mentioned, it surprises, even shocks. Its power to evoke seems doubtful due to its small-scale, trivial and promiscuous character. In our analyses, we tried to find the specific expressive force of this lived image. The call to start a family means that the more obvious scheme of prophecy is broken. In the first two chapters, the 'word of the Lord' comes not only to the prophet Hosea, but to the other family

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[22] Several exegetes note the central role of this term in Hosea – for example, Jeremias, 'Der Prophet Hosea', 44; Willy Schottroff, '*jd'* / erkennen', in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1984), 682–701, at 695–7. In his overview article on the twentieth-century exegesis of Hosea 4–14, Brad Kelle lists the issue of what this 'knowledge' of God means among the central theological questions of the Hosea interpretation (Brad E. Kelle, 'Hosea 4–14 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship', *Currents in Biblical Research* 8/3 (2010): 314–75, at 348). Apart from some doubter of a definite content, the interpretations of this 'knowing' range from cognitive knowledge of Torah, divine obligation, divine attributes or acknowledging God's sovereign status, to an intimate relationship. For a discussion of the sexual connotation of 'knowing' and the problems in its interpretation as associated with God in Hosea 2:20, compare Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 47–50 and 219–20.

[23] Knowledge is also mentioned without an object, as something lacking in Israel (4:6) and as something to which the Israelites are summoned (14:9, the final verse of the book).

members as well. The entire family will proclaim God's word by becoming an image of the relationship with God. By using this image, the people of Israel are addressed in a direct way as wife and children. These seemingly trivial family positions have now been discovered as utterly meaningful. This trivial everydayness of being a family is precisely what is at stake in the unfaithfulness of Israel. The Israelites do not behave like a spouse or a child. In the explanation of this failure the notion of dependence was discovered to be crucial. It is evoked by interweaving the family imagery with a second one, taken from the thriving of the land, which yields more than enough for the daily sustenance of the people. The believers are accused of not acknowledging their interdependence as family members and the intertwinement of their prospering with that of the land or nature. Israel needs to be reminded of this seemingly common reality of being related to and dependent upon God as the one who loves and takes care of them in the form of everyday sustenance. By living it out in the life of a concrete family, this reality is of course brought very close to those who witness Hosea: it is there, embodied, and as such, inescapable; it is not only an imagined reality. Moreover, the observers of this family see a common reality, close to their own experiences. The relationship between God and Israel is thus present in a more concrete, realistic and therefore intense and unavoidable way than in the case of mere verbal imagery.

The promiscuous aspect of the relationship, however, can hardly be called 'trivial' or 'everyday', so it seems. The ideas of being married to an adulterous partner and starting an adulterous family simply seem offensive. In the first chapters, however, the adultery is not presented as some exceptional transgression of a singular person that deserves punishment. It is rather the characterisation of the status quo of Israel. As such, it becomes the setting within which the specific nature of the family relation comes to light. This specificity is expressed in the complex, paradoxical ways explored earlier. It is a relation that is preceded by the adultery, broken because of it, but finally restored nevertheless. Thus, the relationship is continued despite the adultery and its punishment. It is shown as unbreakable. If the only aim was to undo it, the complex project of real marrying and childbirth need not have been started. Thus, precisely the lived-out image of the peculiar adulterous family evokes the complex specificity of being related by the ties of marriage and parenthood. The observers of the image of the family of Gomer and Hosea are reminded of their neglect and denial of their relationship to God. They are also reminded that the relationship nevertheless defines them and they can therefore return to it. This return has to do with acknowledging the

implications of this relationship: they are dependent on God, and this means an interdependence of the entire creation. Adultery means failing to acknowledge this dependence. The living family shows that this dependence cannot be undone. The family is called to account for the tie that exists, the relationship they have with God and each other, despite their neglect of it.

Alice Keefe: Hosea's Adulterous Family as Referring to a Fundamental Destabilisation of Society

We turned to the book of Hosea because it presents an image of a family as a critical judgement of existing behaviour and a call to change. This family symbolises the relationship of dependence between the believers and God of which the people have lost sight. They do not behave like they are God's wife or children. The divine rebuke for this adultery is harsh, but not destructive in the end. The family tie is stronger than its denial. There is a way back in the acknowledgement of the dependence of all living beings on God. The image of the family is concrete and challenging, but not clear-cut and stimulates a creative re-imagination of the actual relationship with God. The notion of dependence that seems the basis of the concrete elaboration of the relationship is still quite general. In recent exegesis, however, what this dependence might mean is specified with an eye to its socio-economic and political aspects. These aspects also reveal an even stronger critical potential inherent in the image of this family. For this interpretation, we turn to Alice Keefe's *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*.[24]

In her exegesis of the book of Hosea, Keefe aims to get beyond dualist schemes that characterise traditional interpretations, but also their twentieth century critics. Over the centuries up until today, interpreters of Hosea have not found it difficult to give a specification of both the family imagery and the adultery. Hosea's central theme of unfaithfulness has been understood primarily as religious and cultic. The imagery of fornication is then taken as referring to sacred prostitution that would be part of the veneration of the pagan fertility god Baal. Since the 1980s, in particular feminist

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[24] See note 4. In his overview article on Hosea 1–3, Brad Kelle emphasises the important contribution of the socio-economic reading of Keefe and the promises her approach holds for future research, next to the 2003 research by Gale Yee (Brad E. Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship', *Currents in Biblical Research* 7/2 (2009): 179–216, at 209). He characterises them as in some ways 'post-feminist' and as combining interest in metaphor with investigations of the socio-economic situation that gave rise to this imagery (201).

exegetes have challenged the legitimacy of this interpretation.[25] According to a recent investigation of the state of the art of Hosea research by Brad Kelle, 'present consensus seems to be that the notion of an institution of cultic prostitution providing the background for texts like Hosea 2 can no longer be sustained without great caution'.[26] Keefe points out how difficult it is for the critics of these traditional interpretations to really get beyond the dualist schemes related to mind versus body, and the opposition between Canaanite fertility religions and Israelite religion as radically different (10). Thus, feminist approaches unmask the interpretation of the adultery as one of cultic prostitution as resulting from a one-sidedly patriarchal view of religion. As a result of this biased approach, women are viewed as embodying a wrong kind of spirituality, closer to nature and thus to the body and fertility. Hosea is, then, one of the oldest sources of this one-sided view. Over against that view, some of them argue that it is precisely Hosea's polemics against the fertility religion that implies that such a religion actually existed and that Gomer was a woman who practised it or represents those women.[27] Keefe argues that this dualist scheme is not convincing as a central interpretive key in understanding Hosea. With the feminist critiques, it is important to underscore that there is archaeological evidence for the presence of female divine figures in Israelite religion. These critiques, however, do not pay enough attention to the fact that the text of Hosea itself displays a way of speaking about God that is full of positive references to nature and fertility. Keefe argues for a different interpretation of Hosea in which the family imagery is of central importance.[28] Moreover, she illuminates the connection between the spheres of family and of natural flourishing and fertility. Therefore, her views are particularly relevant to our interests. We do not introduce Keefe's interpretation as the last word in the exegetical debate on what the family imagery and the adultery in Hosea might mean, but as an example of how the critical potential of family imagery may be elaborated.

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[25] Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 205: 'Since the 1980s, however, scholars have challenged nearly every aspect of the commonly cited literary and archaeological evidence for this practice in general, and its relevance for the study of Hosea 1–3 in particular (see Bucher 1988; Bird 1989; Nwaoru 1999; Keefe 2001; Kelle 2005).'

[26] Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 205.

[27] Keefe (*Woman's Body*, 62–4, 148–50) refers to Helgard Balz-Cochois, Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes and T. Drorah Setel. See also Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 200; Kelle, 'Hosea 4–14', 344.

[28] Kelle mentions Keefe as example of a study that 'expands the interpretive focus of Hosea's imagery beyond that of a husband and wife by reading Hosea 1–3 as a *family* or *household* metaphor, in which the breakup of Hosea's family / household is a metonym for the disintegration of Israel's society' (Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 207).

Central to Keefe's understanding of Hosea are the socio-economic changes that occurred in Hosea's time. These can be summarised as the rise of a centralised government – the monarchy – with interregional and even international trading relations. The new social structures required a different, more commercial kind of agricultural management directed at producing surplus.[29] It led to the rise of a rich elite who made their fortune in the new trade and due to royal privileges. The reverse of this development was increasing poverty among the peasants, who were no longer protected by the local communities. This centralising movement changed the traditional organisation in which local communities were primary also for food production. This organisation was based on extended or compound families because nuclear families on their own would not be able to survive in the harsh climate (Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 112, cf. 80, 193). As a result, the language of kinship was used also for the less close relationships between the different families of a locality or village (116). This family-based character of society was visible in the sacred status of property – unsellable inheritance instead of commodity – and in religious practices related to ancestors, family gods or *t^erāphîm* (113–15, 193). Political and judicial power also resided at the family level (117). This orientation accounts for the fact that family was 'the root metaphor or model for thinking about the structure and meaning of all levels of social organization' – that is, also for speaking about clans, tribes and the people of Israel as a whole (117–18). The growing, centralised monarchical power thus implied a challenge to the traditional sacred status of the relations of 'interdependence and mutuality among extended families and regional associations' (31). The local farmers feared becoming even more vulnerable because of the increasing power of international traders. A small elite was becoming richer and more powerful. In the meantime, the monarchy was the scene of murder and fraud and the power of Assyria and Egypt over Israel increased.[30] These

[29] Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 12, 27–31, 80, 89; in the final chapter ('Rereading Hosea's Family Metaphor', 190–221), this socio-economic contextualisation is investigated as to its power to reveal the meanings inherent in the family metaphor. The technical term for the new socio-economic organisation in the monarchy is that of 'latifundialization': *latifundia* are 'agrarian estates' that produce one or only a few cash crops intended for trade. This differs from an economy based on self-supporting local farms run by extended families (28). References to this process of 'latifundialization' are found among all prophets of the eighth century, in addition to Hosea, Amos, Micah and Isaiah of Jerusalem (31–2). Keefe also uses the term 'command economy' for this organisation in which 'distribution and flow of wealth are determined by the mandates of the royal administration'. The holders of the large estates received privileges in return for loyalty and support of the crown (192n3).

[30] Compare Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 24–7. Historical investigations of Hosea's time (eighth century BCE) show that it was a time of unrest and violence. There are references in Hosea to a period of unrest, which must be the unrest that occurred after the ending in 747 BCE of the forty-one years of the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel. Several pretenders to the throne were murdered; brief kingships followed one another and the country was in a state of 'virtual civil war'. Some ten years later,

changes finally have their parallels in changing cultic practices that should confirm the new order (95–103).

By taking into account this socio-economic and political background, Keefe arrives at an understanding of Israel's fornication that differs from the traditional ones and also from the 'resistant reader' views of feminist exegetes. The fornication should not be interpreted in the literal sense of a religious fertility cult involving sexual acts, but is illicit in a far more fundamental sense.[31] Female sexual transgression means a destabilisation of the community. Images of such transgression 'figure social conflict or violence' (190). The social conflict at stake in Hosea, then, is precisely the one sketched earlier in this chapter. The unfaithfulness concerns the new socio-economic situation characterised by ignorance of the interdependence of the traditional family-oriented local communities. The 'lovers' are called 'Baal' (2:10) and as such, placed over against God not because of a concrete polytheist cult (196): they are metaphors for indicating the new sources people rely on for guaranteeing their life (122–39). Among them are Israel's new 'international liaisons' with Assyria or Egypt (125–30, 195–6; Hos. 5:13; 7:8–9, 11; 12:1).

These meanings all resonate in Israel's fornication as its failing to acknowledge who gives 'grain, new wine and oil'. The accusation of unfaithfulness is thus directed first of all to the 'desire of the powerful and wealthy for the profits and pleasures' produced by the new international trade (197). As a result of this trade, the local tenants, on their part, become more dependent on the 'mercies' of this elite group of traders than on the 'fertility of the soil' (198). Thus, the socio-economic changes affect both the existing family structures and agricultural practices. Paying attention to the central role of family in society, like Hosea does, also means attention to the fertility of the people and their future, as well as the thriving of the land. As Keefe summarises, 'the woman's body as the fertile land, productive of sustenance, evokes the meaning of a community bound up in the intimate relatedness of these families to their lands, which yield

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another source of instability was the violent expansion of the imperium of Assyria with its practices of mass deportation. Around 733 BCE, Israel and Judah had become tributaries of Assyrians. Israel, however, aims together with Aram (or the Syrians) for a revolt against the Assyrians (Syro-Ephraimite War), while Judah under King Achaz hopes for help precisely from the Assyrians against the pressure exerted by Israel. In the end, the Assyrians do win, but this also means the gradual annexation of Israel as a province of Assyria (Jeremias, 'Der Prophet Hosea', 17–18). Again royal assassinations take place (Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 25). The political unrest thus concerns this internal bloodshed as well as the broader setting of the attempts to resist or find support from the superpowers of Assyria and Egypt.

[31] As indicated earlier (note 4), Keefe argues that fornication as a rupture of the social order should be distinguished from prostitution, which was a 'legal and tolerated activity in ancient Israel' (*Woman's Body*, 20).

their life-sustaining bounty' (216). Keefe thus interprets Hosea's family imagery as a sign of 'a strong notion of family or kinship networks as definitive of the meaning and structure of human existence' (190). Here, religion is clearly not, as in many modern views, abstracted from the materiality of human existence, but concerns 'realities such as land and food, systems of production and exchange, and structures of social organization' (194, cf. 221). This religious experience of material realities may be connected to the lived character of the image we emphasised earlier: the lived character brings this concrete, material life to the fore.

The Critical Potential of Hosea's 'Strong' Family Imagery: A Call for Change

Keefe aims to get beyond an interpretation of the adultery and the references to the worshipping of the Baals in Hosea solely in terms of cultic apostasy. More is at stake in the accusation of unfaithfulness. The family imagery – viewed against the background of the socio-economic situation of Hosea's time – is a key to this interpretation. In her reading, the indictment of fornication does not refer to rather extreme and on the other hand limited practices of a pagan cult of, for example, sacred prostitution, but to something both more everyday and more fundamental. The basic attitude towards life is at stake. This fundamental interpretation brings to mind the view of givenness developed in Chapter 3. There, we concluded that it is not by chance that it is precisely the phenomenon of family which confronts one with givenness: it embodies what may be called a structure of life in a pre-eminent way. Keefe's interpretation may be elaborated in this sense – which goes beyond her own reflections. The family-threatening powers Keefe identifies in Hosea have to do with a new attitude that is developing. It seems to aim for more human control over life by innovations in agriculture and economy, supported by new cultic practices. This aim for control differs from the attitude we discovered in the notion of givenness. Experiencing aspects of life as given means respecting them, taking them seriously in order to descry their deeper meaning. Against the background of Keefe's interpretation, this deeper meaning of family may be specified in terms of the importance of 'a community bound up in the intimate relatedness of these families to their lands, which yield their life-sustaining bounty' (216). Thus, family is taken as revealing central meanings in human life that go beyond family as such. Again, we are reminded of Marcel's phrase about the glimpse of the bond with life that family may evoke. Hosea calls to mind this bond when he insists on the basic importance of acknowledging God as the giver of daily sustenance.

Again, it is important to underline that this call is expressed in Hosea in the form of a lived image. Otherwise, the appeal to acknowledge one's interrelatedness that is rooted in a dependence on God may be misunderstood as expressing a univocal, conservative message of returning to the old days. The old order is indeed threatened, but the solution is not simply a revaluation of the importance of family. The people are called to reimagine themselves as the wife or children of God. This image is then elaborated by a second one, which depicts the interdependence of all life as a flourishing of nature. The call to acknowledge God is an appeal to take one's place in this interrelated order and to rely on it as a good order, aiming for life. What is at stake in the threat to the importance of family may thus be specified as a larger dependence. The image that evokes this larger sphere may even be interpreted as a 'strong image' in Boehm's sense. The image preserves its image character, here, for example, by switching between the metaphor of the wife–husband and child–parent relationship, and the complementary images of fertile nature. The adulterous family thus does not appear as a 'copy' of Israel's behaviour as the traditional, literal readings of Hosea suppose. Nor is it a 'simulation' in the sense that the family character does not matter and has no specific meaning. The imagery of family is used consciously and in its everyday character to evoke the question of what God's love and care mean for everyday life.

Hosea thus brings to light once more the specific power of family as an image. In comparison with Rembrandt's Holy Family, the appeal of Hosea's imagery is less open and more critical. It does not just invite adopting a specific attitude that is sensitive to the deeper meaning given in family – which is as such controversial in our time. The criticism of Hosea's image is far more specific: it is an intense appeal for a change in attitude. The people should stop trying to manage or control life and in particular their dependence by specific cultic rituals or political alliances and move towards being dependent in the ways spouses or parents and children are. The odd image of the adulterous family functions critically by making them aware of the family tie that remains despite the adultery. The criticism is not just prophetic doom. There is a way out of the unfaithfulness in acknowledging dependence.

Acknowledging Dependence and a Suspicion against Family in Current (Care) Ethics

We started our analysis of Hosea's lived image of the family in search of a further specification of the general attitude implied in the view of family as given. What does it mean for one's understanding of human beings, and

for how one should act within a family, as well as for one's being in the world? Hosea is a relevant source to explore these questions because family figures as an image in a critical prophetic admonition. It aims for a change in the life of the people. The specification that Hosea's family imagery reveals lies in the appeal to acknowledge one's position in the whole of life, one's being related, and to actively respond to it and rely on God as its ultimate source. Keefe's contextualised interpretation of Hosea's family imagery subsequently revealed an even stronger critical potential of the family imagery. The critical power of the appeal to acknowledge the interdependence of all life reaches in Hosea's case as far as international politics. In Hosea, this potential to critically address topical societal issues is situated in an ancient, religious agricultural society. Here, the attitude of relying on each other and on a higher power may be more obvious than in the present highly technological, secular and individualised age. Yet the specification of what family might mean that becomes visible in the Hosean imagery is not without parallels in current ethics. The importance of acknowledging interdependence and the role of care in human life is being advanced by many ethicists at present, with critical aims.[32] 'Care ethics' or the 'ethics of care' has even developed into a distinct branch of ethics. These ethicists emphasise that being cared for is constitutive of being human.

   The background against which this contemporary plea for dependence is made is the correction of the one-sidedness of dominant views of human beings, which are broadly indicated in this debate by the label 'modern'. These views are characterised as focussing on individual autonomy and independence, the capacity to reflect and act rationally and to be in control. The criticism of these views as 'prejudiced' does not mean a complete rejection of the importance of free decision-making. Rather critics point out that, precisely in order to decide freely on what one thinks important in one's individual life, care, sustenance and cooperation with others are indispensable. This other side of the coin remains invisible or

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[32] For an overview of the development of care ethics as a discipline, see, for example, Marilyn Friedman, 'Care Ethics', in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. by Hugh LaFollette (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 705–13; Virginia Held, 'The Ethics of Care', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. by David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 537–66, (https://doi.org/10.1093/0195147790.003.0020). For an overview of the topics addressed in ethics under 'dependence', see chapter 6, 'Dependency and Disability', in Eva Feder Kittay, *Learning from My Daughter: The Value and Care of Disabled Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143–63 (which refers to Kittay's earlier article 'Dependence', in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 54–8). See also a special issue by Kim Q. Hall (ed.), 'New Conversations in Feminist Disability Studies', *Hypatia* 30/1 (2015).

obscure in modern views of being human. They do not display that, in the end, people cannot become independent without having been, at least for certain periods in their lives, completely dependent on the care of others. Moreover, in less acute but nonetheless undeniable ways, we remain dependent on others every day, most visibly in the division of labour. Nobody can be a completely self-supporting Robinson Crusoe: the soil, sun and rain are as indispensable to people as the good company of other living creatures – an argument that also parallels themes from Hosea.

This criticism of modern views of being human and of acting recalls those analysed in relation to our earlier topics of the family tie and its givenness. In Chapter 2, this criticism was directed at views of acting that leave out factors beyond one's direct reach that are nevertheless constitutive of acting. Butler's critical and Ciavatta's favourable interpretation of how Hegel accounts for this 'other side of freedom' showed the topicality of this criticism. In Chapter 3, the paradigm shift in the understanding of kinship in anthropology also included a distancing from the modern individualist perspective on human beings. Notions like Sahlins' 'mutuality of being' aim to provide an alternative view of human beings and their relationship. The resonances between these views and the recent ethical debate on acknowledging dependence confirm that it makes sense to take the notion of dependence as a starting point to elaborate on what family might mean in concrete terms and the moral weight of its givenness. Moreover, in all these debates, family functions as a phenomenon with a critical potential: it brings to light a neglected side of being human. Therefore, the recent debate on dependence seems a proper context for investigating the critical potential of dependence as a specification of the given family tie. The authors committed to reconsidering dependence do not so much address this issue directly from the perspective of family, however. Usually, attention to the issue emerges from taking into account human vulnerability, in particular in the form of illness, disability or the life stages of early childhood and old age. Family, on the other hand, is seen as part of the problem of the obscuring of dependence. This suspicion of family makes the debate an even more relevant sparring partner for our project. First, it offers ample opportunity to explore today's relevance of the topic of fundamental interdependence. Subsequently, it makes it possible to investigate why family is not approached, as in our project, as a phenomenon that confronts people today with this dependence and with the difficulties of living it. To perform the second investigation, it is necessary to first analyse how the obscuring of dependence in modernity is explained and ethically valued.

Eva Feder Kittay: The 'Dependency Critique' of the Feminist Ideal of Equality

A prominent author in the recent ethical appeal for a reappraisal of dependence and care is Eva Feder Kittay. In her classic study *Love's Labor* (1999), she elaborates on this reappraisal against the background of the feminist struggle for equality between women and men. She characterises her approach as a 'dependency critique'.[33] This critique concerns the inadequacy of an ideal of sexual equality as implying that women should have the same rights and privileges as men. Presupposed in this perspective is a view of society as 'an association of equals' (*Love's Labor*, 15). In spite of its progressive power, this is in the end a 'limiting and limited ideal in the context of woman's subordination'. Kittay gives three reasons for the insufficiency of this view. First, this ideal does not take into account the 'inevitable dependencies and asymmetries' that characterise human life (14). These are the dependencies of 'children, the aging and the ailing'. In fact, women usually take care of the needs of these dependants. Second, equality as an ideal does not do justice to the fact that many societal interactions are 'not between persons symmetrically situated' (15). Finally, the ideal of equality is to be realised by the participation of women in paid labour that is so far largely done by men. This is, in fact, a privilege only few women can attain, usually white upper- and upper-middle-class women. As a result, the dependency work they performed before shifts to women of lower classes. Thus, 'structures of domination and subordination' are maintained. The dependency critique points out that the role of women as taking care of a dependant is a contingent one, but that this care has to be done anyway, and this care makes those who perform it 'vulnerable to domination'. There will always be dependent people who need care. How can one prevent them from being excluded from the 'class of equals' together with those who care for them (16)?

   Kittay's characterisation of the dependency critique summarises well the core elements put forward by many advocates of the revaluation of

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[33] By this title, Feder Kittay distinguishes her approach from three other feminist critiques, those of difference, dominance and diversity (*Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 8–16).
   Among the authors who argue in favour of acknowledging dependence, both the term 'dependence' and that of 'dependency' are used with no difference in meaning. We will use the term 'dependence', but incidentally also that of 'dependency' when referring to authors who prefer it, as in the expression 'dependency critique'. The analysis of this broader dependency critique given in the current section is based on the works of Kittay.

care and dependence. We will therefore use Kittay's phrase, 'dependency critique', to refer to this way of reasoning in current ethics at large. Central to this argument is the analysis of the modern treatment of dependence as one of obfuscation.

Fraser and Gordon: A Genealogy of the Problem Character of Dependence in Modernity

Many recent studies that call for attention to the modern obfuscation of the reality of being dependent refer to an article from the mid-1990s that provides a 'genealogy' of the meaning of the word 'dependency' from pre-industrial times until the present.[34] In this genealogy, the authors – the philosopher Nancy Fraser and the historian Linda Gordon – argue that in pre-industrial times, dependency was self-evident and, at the same time, a publicly visible and acknowledged fact of life. Here dependency meant being in a subordinate relationship to someone. For today's readers, subordination has negative connotations since modern ideals of equality do away with subordination, in particular involuntary subordination. Of course, not everyone can be a leader or ruler, but democracy means that those who are subordinate also have a voice in important issues and specific rights and responsibilities. In the non-democratic pre-industrial situations, however, 'nearly everyone was subordinate to someone else' (313). Only persons like the head of a household were in the extraordinary and privileged position of independence. Even for them, the 'reverse dependence of the master upon his men' was widely recognised. In the feudal setting, dependence meant 'interdependence' (313n4). The big difference with our time is that no stigma was attached to the notion of dependence. Nowadays, this stigma entails being isolated as a specific group of people who suffer from this phenomenon while its opposite, independence, is highly valued.

How could the situation change so fundamentally from dependence as a self-evident, 'normal and unstigmatized condition' of all human beings to something deviant and shameful? Fraser and Gordon locate the origins of this change in the rise of a more differentiated understanding of dependency (319). The term no longer referred to a general human state, but to four different perspectives on human life related to the economy, sociolegal

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[34] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19/2 (1994): 309–36 (also published in Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (1997), and Kittay, *The Subject of Care* (2002)).

views, politics and a combination of psychological insights and moral valuations (315).[35] These registers were, moreover, understood in terms of gendered or racial constructs which came into use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the meantime, the notion of independence was democratised. It was framed in radical religious and emancipatory movements as the more advantageous position and associated with citizenship, while hierarchy became more and more objectionable. These developments were paralleled economically in the new interpretation of wage labour as no longer implying dependence, but rather as a precondition of becoming independent. As regards wage labour, the ideal gradually developed that the entire family should be supported by the wage earned by the husband, on whom all other household members then depend. In this process of an emergent ideal of independence associated with white men, dependency was no longer a social category applying more or less to all people. It now pertained to specific individuals who were seen as naturally predisposed to it. According to Fraser and Gordon, three iconic figures embody this dependence: the pauper, the colonial native and the woman (316–18). The language of dependence became 'deeply inflected by gender, race and class' (319).

In this gradual semantic change, the authors of the 'genealogy' descry a rhetoric that no longer reflects reality as it is, but rather obfuscates it. For, in fact, dependence continued to pertain to all people. In particular, the ideal of independence based on the family wage obscures the fact that this pay was usually insufficient to support the entire family and had to be supplemented by the labour of the woman and children. Moreover, workers were still dependent on their employers. Hierarchy did not disappear. Of course, during the times in which dependence was understood as common, there was also hierarchy with the risk of highly problematic effects, especially for those lowest on the social ladder. The difference with the new situation is that the discourse of dependence and independence serves an ideology that hides what is actually happening (319). Most of the people conforming to the ideal of independence on the basis of their receiving wages are in fact anything but independent (319). Moreover, dependence as the opposite of this ideal is not just something to be avoided, but a state to which certain people are condemned on the

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[35] These four registers of dependence are introduced at the start of the article (312) as 'abstract' and 'metaphorical' meanings derived from the 'root meaning' of 'a physical relationship in which one thing hangs from another'. This division into four is also widely quoted in dependency literature up to today (e.g., Kittay, 'Dependence').

basis of gender, race or a deviant character. If a family cannot compensate for this dependence, society must take care of these dependants in the form of welfare. Paradoxically, however, at the same time, such financial aid came to be perceived as problematic itself. Welfare aid would increase the dependence of those people because they no longer received any impulse to become independent wage workers, but rather viewed themselves as 'having a right and title to relief' (321).[36] In the post-industrial society, these developments culminate in dependence coming to be seen as completely negative as well as 'avoidable and blameworthy' (323). Precisely as a result of the decrease of much sociolegal and political dependence and of the dominance of the family wage model, dependence came to be seen as deviant and exceptional. People are individually responsible for this fault, although gender and race are still regarded as predisposing factors. The icon of dependence in the 1980s is therefore the black, teenage single mother supported by welfare (327). In this icon, according to Fraser and Gordon, all the historical meanings come together that were gradually added to dependence in the wake of the rhetoric of independence.

Attention to Dependence and Care because of Its Modern Marginalisation and Privatisation

Fraser and Gordon have a clear motive for their genealogy of dependence. By analysing this historical process, they aim for a critical reassessment of the current discourse of dependence and independence in favour of emancipating the people who are currently stigmatised by it. An explicit plea to regard dependence as common is not heard in the text, however. As the broad reception of the article indicates, other authors who do make this plea find ample material for support in this historical sketch. As such, it forms an important background of the 'dependency critique'. Usually, these critics also have a more specific reason to discuss dependence than the general stigmatisation related to it. They observe a lack of attention paid to care in current society and in theoretical reflection. As we saw in Kittay's summary of the dependency critique, being dependent refers first of all to people who cannot care for themselves: chronically ill, disabled or frail elderly people, as well as young children. Their

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[36] Fraser and Gordon observe this development in the United States from the end of the nineteenth century on ('A Genealogy of Dependency', 319–23).

marginalisation in Western societies because of a focus on the capable, rational and autonomous individual also affects those who care for them. They are paid insufficiently or have to perform this care as an extra unpaid workload, often in addition to paid work. Care for dependants takes place in the invisible, private sphere of the home and family. There is hardly any public acknowledgement – material or immaterial – of the struggle of such care.

This marginalisation and privatisation of being dependent and of caring for the dependant takes place not just in society at large, but also influences Western thought in general. Here, the dependency critique observes a lack of attention to dependence and care.[37] Political and economic theorising and theories on justice especially presuppose the very same ideal of the independent, self-sufficient, autonomous individual.[38] John Rawls' theory of justice often figures in the dependency critique as the most influential twentieth-century example of such theorising. In line with the anti-hierarchical aims of Enlightenment theory, and social contract theory in particular, Rawls focusses on equality as the basic premise of justice.[39] Equality means that we cannot determine what is good in general and thus for others. Every individual must determine his or her own interests and negotiate with others on how they can be realised. To this end, Rawls develops the famous approach of imagining the 'original position' behind the 'veil of ignorance', an artificial state in which all inequality between people is negated and all people are taken to be autonomous individuals able to negotiate on their own.[40] This does not mean that Rawls is blind to

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[37] For further references, see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Paul Carus Lectures (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 1; Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1. Sullivan-Dunbar's book deals both with Christian ethics of love and neoclassical economics as examples of the theoretical legitimation of the privatisation of family. We analyse her study more closely later.

[38] Sullivan-Dunbar calls this an Enlightenment development (*Human Dependency*, 27–8).

[39] Sullivan-Dunbar analyses Rawls as continuing the Enlightenment social contract of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (*Human Dependency*, 28–35). She characterises Hobbes' political theory as erasing dependency and care, while Locke privatises them. Erasure of the complexities of dependence and care occurs in Hobbes' theory because the only legitimate basis for any kind of authority is consent, and relations are seen as based not on affection, but on fear. This picture also holds for the theme of family, so that affection and dependence, even of children, are not taken into account. Only by leaving out this reality is Locke able to stick to a radical equality of human beings (29–32). Although Locke does distinguish between political authority and that of parents, his view of family simply presumes dependence and care as the woman's task and the wife's subordination to her husband in issues of disagreement (32–5). The 'Enlightenment legacy' of the ignorance of the domestic sphere and the specific dependence and care of family continues in contemporary political theory, according to Sullivan-Dunbar (35).

[40] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge. MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

the reality of inequality. He only deals with it, however, in the form of very general rules for the equal redistribution of goods. They allow for inequality only when the least well-off benefit from it. What the dependence authors miss in such elaborations of equality in political theory is the reality of lived inequality. The dependency critique emphasises that justice should be a category that also includes the situations of care because the threat of injustice is paramount there. Care relations are dependence relations, which imply inequality, asymmetry and having to decide for the other what is good. Moreover, they ask for sacrifices on the part of the caring persons. All these real-life aspects are not just personal, private issues, but also political ones and should be part of reflections on societal justice. This implies that the private world of family where most care for dependants is performed cannot be excluded from the sphere of justice.

The tenor of the dependency critique is not just critical. The constructive elements of its analysis lie first of all in making visible the invisible, marginalised reality of care for dependants. This often happens on the basis of personal experiences, like in the case of Kittay and her daughter, Sesha, who is severely mentally challenged. Thus, they bring out the complexity and dangers of such care relations: the self-sacrifice of those who care, and inequality or asymmetry in power relations between the dependent person and the caregivers. Another constructive element in the dependence analyses is the emphasis on the fundamental character of dependence, as constitutive of being human. They aim to correct the dominant view of human beings by characterising dependence as 'inevitable', 'biological', 'ontological', 'foundational' and so forth.[41]

It is important to examine the general conclusions of the dependency critique more closely. For the 'ontological' status of dependence which they point out is not the original cause or motive of the critique. Rather, these authors are motivated by the injustice of the lack of attention to care for dependants, which results in its marginalisation and privatisation. Consequently, a tension arises, or even an impasse, which the dependency critics do not notice. They emphasise dependence as inevitable in order to correct its perception as incidental. This general conclusion is based, however, on analyses of incidental cases, and not on a separate, thorough analysis of other aspects of the human condition. Reflection on these

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[41] Kittay expands Fraser and Gordon's four registers of dependence by the fifth of 'inevitable dependence', referring to 'biologically based limitations' ('Dependence', 54). Martha Fineman also calls this fundamental dependence 'biological' (Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York: New Press, 2004), e.g., 35). Sullivan-Dunbar uses the phrase 'ontological dependency on the ground of our being' (*Human Dependency*, 48).

exceptional moments of intensive care forms the most substantial part of their reasoning. With the claim that dependence is common and not pathological or exceptional, the reasoning arrives at a different level. The general claims regarding the ontological status of dependence are brief and derived or secondary in the argument.[42] Primary are the abuses and injustices that result from the obfuscation of the foundational character of dependence. As a result, dependence remains a situation that is principally approached as troublesome and not as common. Furthermore, because of the emancipatory aims of changing the marginalised position of the dependant and their caretakers, the human striving for autonomy and independence is acknowledged as important. The plea is not a call to 'become dependent' but to realise that the desirable state of autonomy can never be attained by leaving dependence behind. It is the inextricability of dependence and independence that should be acknowledged. In this interwovenness, independence remains the desirable quality and dependence the sorry and difficult counterpart that people cannot do away with.

Alasdair MacIntyre: Attention to the Dependence of Independent Reasoners

The impasse that occurs due to the tension between the plea to acknowledge dependence and its actual undesirable status is not just visible in ethics that takes its starting point in care and thus in the exceptional reality of, in particular, illness, disability, childhood and old age. In his Paul Carus Lectures entitled *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), Alasdair MacIntyre's starting point is not care, but fundamental anthropological questions, especially the question of the distinction between human beings and animals. In dealing with this issue, a tension becomes visible similar to that of the care ethicists. MacIntyre understands adult human beings as 'independent rational agents' and asks how this adult state relates to the original situation of dependence.[43] In this context, he also refers to family. The dependence of children means being 'engaged in and defined by a set of social relationships which are not at all of her or his own making' (74). This changes as one grows up: relationships become those between

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[42] This tension between the fundamental character of the claim and the incidental character of the care situation is clear in statements like these by Martha Albertson Fineman: '[A] state of dependency is a natural part of the human condition . . . All of us were dependent as children, and many of us will be dependent as we age, become ill, or suffer disabilities.' She opposes this to a view of dependence as 'pathological' (*Autonomy Myth*, 35).

[43] For MacIntyre, early childhood is closer to the animal state. He also parallels the dependence of early childhood to 'old age and . . . those periods when we are injured or physically or mentally ill' (*Dependent Rational Animals*, 155).

'independent practical reasoners' who cooperate to achieve the common good, including those dependent on them. The development towards independence means learning to distance oneself from one's desires, to evaluate one's reasons for action, and to imagine the future as regards its possibilities (chapter 7). Thus, human beings become accountable for their acts. This state of being able to reason soundly and independently is 'one essential constituent to full human flourishing' (105). MacIntyre's aim in this analysis of specifically human qualities is to show that, in the process of becoming independent as well as in its outcome, dependence is not completely done away with.

Where is the dependence of the independent reasoners localised? Human beings remain part of a community, a network of giving and receiving. In particular, the people of this network call one to account and sustain the evaluation of one's reasons to act. As one grows up, one gradually increases in giving, but receiving remains important. Furthermore, in order to become and to be an independent practical reasoner, one needs not just the virtues of independence, but also what MacIntyre calls 'virtues of acknowledged dependence' that cannot simply be understood in terms of the 'conventional virtues' (120, and chapter 10). He does not aim to arrive at something like a complete list of such virtues, but argues rather that these are combinations of virtues usually distinguished as separate. The most important example is that of 'just generosity', which implies both charity or friendship (*caritas*) and taking pity (*misericordia*) (121–8). Here, the aspect of care also comes into view as a kind of test case to determine the limits of this generosity and thus of the network of giving and receiving. Generosity should not just be directed at those who are already part of one's community, but also at 'passing strangers' (126) and those who are so extremely disabled that they can never become active, giving members of the community (127–8). Taking into account these strangers and persons with 'urgent needs' makes one aware that being human requires virtues not only of giving, but also of receiving. This insight 'involves a truthful acknowledgement of dependence', not just of those who cannot participate in the giving, but of everyone. As regards the disabled, MacIntyre argues, people should imagine, 'I might have been that individual' (128).

Care for the disabled is not the primary impulse for MacIntyre's reflection on dependence, but it receives a prominent place in the final part of his argument. This confirms that dependence for him as for the authors of the dependency critique is something that comes into view only secondarily. MacIntyre's qualification of the virtues of dependence as 'acknowledged' virtues seems telling as regards this aspect. The virtues of independence are

not qualified like this. Becoming and being 'independent practical reasoners' is apparently not something that one should acknowledge, but is self-evident. On the other hand, the fact that people are dependent is something they should realise, which implies a moment of pause and distancing oneself from one's natural striving for and being independent. Thus, even in a fundamental anthropological reflection like MacIntyre's, tension remains between the secondary character of dependence and the statements that indicate its foundational character.

Family and the Tension between the Ontological and Incidental Character of Dependence

This tension between the plea to acknowledge dependence as inherent to being human and the exceptional, secondary or undesirable character of the cases of dependence that are analysed is not an integral topic of the dependency critique. This seems to be result of the fact that, despite their criticism of a one-sided view of human beings as independent, this independence remains the self-evident point of reference. Dependence is only to be acknowledged as something indispensable for autonomy and independence and thus also as limiting it. Moreover, the difficulty of the precise balancing of independence and dependence in our time is not discussed as to its everyday character either. The focus is on the problematic and undesirable dependencies in illness and old age. The fact that dependence is not discussed in a more neutral sense, related to everyday life, may be illuminated by taking into account the position of family in these arguments.

Family comes into view primarily in relation to the problematic character of dependence. The problem of the hiddenness and neglect of dependence is paralleled in the privatised character of family as the context of living dependence and care. Privatisation implies invisibility and seclusion. The current family is on its own in the complex and burdensome tasks of upbringing and of care for the chronically ill and disabled. These relations imply asymmetry and power inequalities and thus a high risk of abuse. Moreover, as we have seen, the problem of privatisation also means that care and dependence are not publicly recognised. The people who perform it, mostly women, thus become marginalised. In the different framework of MacIntyre's argument, the approach to family is similar. He emphasises that families are not self-sufficient units but need a broader community and a more general common good to be able to contribute to the flourishing of their members. Dependence should thus not be seen as something characteristic of life in a family in particular. Such an understanding would ignore the necessity of a larger

embeddedness and dangerously overstate the capacities of family.[44] On the other hand, MacIntyre clearly does localise dependence precisely in the setting of family. This is the 'paradigm' context, where children learn the virtues of acknowledged dependence from their parents. The practices characteristic of this context are themselves sustained by these very virtues (135). In a similar way, the dependency critique pays special attention to family in order to bring to light the hidden facts of dependence and care.

The position of family in these studies on dependence is thus ambiguous. It reminds us of the impasse found in Butler when she refrains from paying any constructive attention to kinship while she emphasises interdependence as conditioning the ethical. Similarly, in the authors of the dependency critique, family is on the one hand recognised as the paradigmatic context of living dependence relations. On the other hand, there is a suspicion against family. Family is not approached as a phenomenon that is important as such to understand dependence and the ways in which one should live in this dependence. This suspicion does not mean family does not come into view or is not valued for the specific care it can provide as a result of the affective bonds. Of course, these authors do not simply argue in favour of dissolving these family practices of care and upbringing, but their approach to the theme of dependence originates in the injustices they perceive and aim to correct them. This suspicion reminds us of the attitude which is conspicuous in many studies in the field of family ethics analysed in Chapter 1. These approaches position themselves over against a self-evident commitment to family as the best place for child rearing. To counter the failures of family, they point out the necessity of outlining parental duties and children's rights. In such suspicious, critical approaches, family is not probed as a phenomenon for constructively dealing with fundamental dependence. Rather, these views zoom out to

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[44] At the end of his lectures, MacIntyre aims to formulate the conditions for a community that can embody the networks of giving and receiving necessary to achieve the common good for everyone, the disabled included. He again describes this as a community in which dependence is taken for granted as something human that characterises certain periods of one's life (*Dependent Rational Animals*, 130). The two obvious candidates for such a community are the contemporary nuclear family and the modern nation state (131). Although they are, of course, in part helpful and even necessary to provide resources for the achievement of the common good, they are, according to MacIntyre, unsuited to achieving this common good. The nation state is too large and too much governed by the power of money to provide the recognition of each member as part of the communal deliberation on the common good (131). Family, on the other hand, is too small and therefore, as a separate social unit, insufficient to provide a common good that serves and sustains the virtues of acknowledged dependence (135). It always needs a larger local community. Such a local community in between state and family is what MacIntyre refers to as embodying the right kind of giving and receiving, characterised by regard for each individual, including the disabled, as a person who may have 'lessons to teach us' about our common good (135).

the broader community and argue for an opening up of the sphere of family and a better embedding in broader society. Responsibilities for the dependant should also apply to people beyond the circle of family, to the entire community, which should be partly realised by means of just public policy and financial arrangements. Thus, the obfuscation of the fact that all people are dependent can be counteracted. These arguments may be summarised as aiming at the transparency of the obscuring community of family in order to make the realities of dependence and care a self-evident part of general deliberations on justice and the common good.

A passage from an article by Eva Kittay clearly illustrates this. Writing on just caring, based on her own experiences with her daughter, Sesha, who is severely mentally challenged, she describes that she discovered how dependence is not just something her daughter exhibited, but also something 'mutual'. 'I depend on her as well. Sesha and her well-being are essential to my own . . . Without her, I would wither.'[45] While this seems to be an experience and insight that springs directly from being family members, being mother and daughter, Kittay does not go into this aspect. On the contrary, she immediately broadens these conclusions on their mutual dependence to society at large and to 'everyone [her daughter] touches' – that is, 'those who allow themselves to be touched by her'. Kittay adds that, without her daughter's 'abundant and exuberant love, the world would be a more dismal place'.

The position of family in the arguments for the reappraisal of dependence thus display an impasse related to the one observed between the problematic status and aspired normalcy of dependence. To arrive at the acknowledgement of dependence as a basic human condition and at just practices of care, dependence and care have to be disentangled from the everyday context in which they are most evidently lived or practised – that is, from the context of family. In particular, the specific private, secluded character of family needs to eliminated. However, the examples that are analysed to reveal how fundamental and common dependence is, are situated precisely in this private context of family.

Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar: A Transcendent Perspective on Dependence

We have noted that reflection on the tension between the ontological and common character of dependence on the one hand, and the incidental and problematic cases of dependence is not an integral part of the dependence

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[45] Eva Feder Kittay, 'When Caring Is Just and Justice Is Caring', in *The Subject of Care*, ed. by Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 257–76, at 273.

debate. An exception is a brief passage in Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar's recent theological study *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics* (2017). It is important to discuss this passage because it aims to get beyond the impasse by understanding human fundamental dependence in a religious way. Dependence should be understood as ultimately rooted in God. This reasoning brings to the fore an understanding of dependence that seems to resonate with Hosea's imagery. It may also be in line with an approach characterised by mystery that displays a feeling for the sacred. Before taking stock of what our analysis of the ethical pleas for a reappraisal of dependence has yielded, we will look at this position as a possible route to get beyond the tensions we noted.

Sullivan-Dunbar's recent monograph may well be categorised among the dependency critique discussed so far. Her main aim is bringing to light the neglected anthropological fact of dependence. She writes from a Christian theological perspective. Apart from the theological authors she analyses, this Christian character becomes visible more emphatically at the end of her book. Here we find the passage in which she addresses precisely the impasse indicated earlier. She observes it particularly among non-theological thinkers in this debate. Although they advocate a more intense acknowledgement of the fundamental character of human dependence, dependence remains at the same time a 'discomfortable' theme (220). Their primary concern is the injustice of the marginalisation of care for dependants. As an example, Sullivan-Dunbar quotes the political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto, who aims for a 'democratic order' as an 'antidote to the "dangers of dependence"' (222n87). Tronto's argument implies a paradoxical account of dependence as both 'a necessity' to acknowledge and a 'condition to overcome'. Paramount in this and similar approaches is the striving for a rational underpinning of equality. Sullivan-Dunbar recognises this struggle as her own, but points out the difference between equality as a 'project' or as a 'given' (220). In the case of the project approach, dependence may in the end be obscured and not acknowledged as a reason for support because it involves inequalities that are 'irremediable'. Sometimes, this obscuring happens by distinguishing dependence from vulnerability, the latter being the more foundational of the two (222). In such views, dependence becomes 'the exception' or 'sporadic' (223). The main aim of these thinkers is, then, to 'parse out degrees of dependency and autonomy in order to better assign responsibility for self and others more justly' (224). Sullivan-Dunbar admits the importance of distinguishing degrees and periods of dependence also in relation to developing just social, economic and political processes. The problem, however, is that such

nuancing distinctions 'belie the fact that dependency shoots through our existence' (224).

In response to this crucial shortcoming, Sullivan-Dunbar proposes a view in which dependence is 'faced more squarely' (225). It is in relation to this acknowledging of the fundamental character of dependence that she refers to a transcendent dimension. Sullivan-Dunbar expresses this fundamental dependence in terms of 'being creatures', which she explains as meaning in Christian theology that 'we are dependent upon God' (224). According to Sullivan, this view of a fundamental dependence on the 'Ground of our Being' relativises the project just mentioned of 'parsing out differences in our levels of dependency' (225). It is this fundamental dependence that makes human beings 'profoundly equal' (225) and not so much their being characterised by 'vulnerable autonomy' (223).

Sullivan-Dunbar does not present this understanding from the start as uniquely theological. She considers Eva Feder Kittay's view of dependence as a possible candidate of a secular theory that does face dependence 'more squarely' than the aforementioned 'project' approaches do (225–7). As we have seen, Kittay's philosophical thinking is part of the recent philosophical reflection on disability, particularly cognitive disability. Sullivan-Dunbar focusses on the 'aphorism' by which Kittay expresses the fundamental dependence which is the basis for human equality both 'literally and metaphorically'. This is the phrase that all human beings are 'some mother's child'.[46] Kittay explains this expression as implying a relational understanding of equality instead of an individual one. The difference between the two is that what is at stake in respecting persons as equal is not first of all honouring the independent individual with his or her rights, powers and conception of the good, but individuals in their connectedness. Understanding equality in such a relational sense generates claims that are not derived from rights, but from 'what is due us by virtue of our connection to those with whom we have had and are likely to have relations of care and dependency' (66). Moreover, the maxim that all human beings are 'some mother's child' indicates how people should be treated – that is, in a way 'analogous to the treatment a mother renders to a child' (68). Everybody is inalienably worthy of this treatment because being related is a 'fundamental

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[46] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 50. Kittay explains that she uses the term 'mother' in an 'extended sense' taken from Ruddick (1989), which includes 'any individual, regardless of gender, who does the primary caretaking' (199n102).

condition for human survival' (69). In respecting others as 'some mother's child', people 'honor the efforts of the mothering person that has raised this individual' and 'symbolically of all mothering persons'.

To explain Kittay's view, Sullivan-Dunbar quotes a passage in which Kittay refers to this relationship between the child and the mothering person as sacred. Not respecting the other as a mother's child means, according to Kittay, 'violat[ing] the sanctity of the relationship that makes possible all human connection', and is thus a disavowal of the 'importance of human connection *per se*' (Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 69). In an earlier article in which Sullivan-Dunbar also analyses Kittay, she refers to this passage as well and also to another one in which Kittay speaks of the 'sacred responsibility to love, nurture, and care' for the child born to you (Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 153).[47] In her book, Sullivan-Dunbar does not elaborate on this sacredness – although this seems relevant in relation to her own theological statement. In the article, she only adds the remark that Kittay's vocabulary of 'sanctity and inviolability' is a parallel with the theological discourse of being 'a child of God' (Sullivan-Dunbar, 'Gratuity, Embodiment, and Reciprocity', 272). Surprisingly, Sullivan-Dunbar subsequently concludes that Kittay's way of arguing on the basis of being some mother's child is inadequate. By grounding human dignity in the fact that the mothering person has cared for one, Kittay bypasses the problem of the failure of caring human relationships. These mothering relations are often 'deeply unsatisfactory, even abusive'.[48] As a result, Sullivan-Dunbar sees no reason to call this motherly relationship sacred. Nor does she agree that it is precisely this relation that 'makes all human connection possible', as Kittay argues.

Sullivan-Dunbar's appeal to a transcendent dimension in the form of a fundamental dependence of all creatures on God is thus formulated again in opposition to the dependence as it is displayed in family. In the article, Sullivan-Dunbar underscores this opposition by stating that 'God's gratuity exists before the gratuity of the mothering person' (274). Christian theological language therefore has 'better conceptual resources' to argue that 'persons are intrinsically valuable' than the secular one of Kittay.[49] It is precisely the

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[47] Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, 'Gratuity, Embodiment, and Reciprocity: Christian Love and Justice in Light of Human Dependency', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41/2 (2013): 254–79, at 262 (with incorrect page numbers in Kittay: not 163–4, but 153–4) and 271.

[48] In her book, Sullivan-Dunbar arrives at the same conclusion but gives less attention to the sanctity of the relationship: 'human relationships are all too fallible to serve as the ground for human dignity, personhood, or moral equality' (*Human Dependency*, 226).

[49] In her 2013 article 'Gratuity, Embodiment, and Reciprocity', Sullivan-Dunbar elaborates this comparison between a secular and a theological approach by analysing Kittay's secular argument next to that of the Protestant Christian ethicist Timothy Jackson.

transcendent, non-creaturely aspect that should guard against the problematic, flawed way dependence is experienced in creation. It is in order to overcome the injustices of hidden and privatised dependence that transcendence is invoked. Thus, Sullivan-Dunbar arrives at the conclusion that 'our complex dependency on each other is qualitatively different from our dependency on our Creator' (225). An analogy between the two exists only in their 'very pervasiveness'. Sullivan-Dunbar does not expand on this analogy, however, and, as a result, the relationship of the ultimate dependence on God and the instances of 'embodied dependence' is first of all one of contrast. Dependence in the case of human beings is always liable to disregard and abuse, despite the fact that it is an inevitable characteristic of all of life. Human dependence on God is the basis from which this abuse can be countered.

Suspicion against Family and the Neglect of the Everyday Character of Dependence

We investigated Sullivan-Dunbar's view because of her awareness of the impasse that arises when dependence is emphasised as fundamental while it is also 'discomfortable'. Her taking a transcendent perspective into account aims to provide an alternative in which equality is a 'given' rather than a 'project'. This distinction as well as the transcendent perspective made us wonder whether this form of dependency critique resonates with our approach to family and dependence as mystery. With this approach, we aim for a more constructive elaboration of dependence in relation to everyday experiences as exemplified pre-eminently in the sphere of family. This attention to the everyday character does not follow in Sullivan-Dunbar, however. Nor is the suspicion absent against family as a context of living dependence. As a result, the tensions we noticed in the dependency critique and MacIntyre remain alive here as well, and are even augmented because theological language is introduced to overcome the impasse. The human capacities to live with dependence as found in family cannot offer the right perspective nor the conceptual language to express the fundamental nature of dependence.

 These tensions or impasses are not unproblematic. First of all, they give rise to the question of whether it is convincing to arrive at a view of dependence as self-evident and constitutive of being human via the negative and exceptional cases.[50] Does such an understanding of dependence

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[50] Kittay recognises the issue of how broad dependence should be interpreted. She admits it may be extended to adult children, hidden dependencies of men and women or every kind of 'ancillary or supportive job'. She states, however, that such an extended view of dependence is not the starting point of her approach. She starts with dependency work in the strict sense of care for children, ailing

not remain invested with the aura of difficulty and undesirability? It makes people aware of dependence as something of their past, in the sense of childhood, or as something that may strike them when they become ill or grow old. Does this not, though, suggest that, as long as this is no more, or not yet the case, dependence is not a reality in people's lives? One cannot rule out this scenario in principle, but is that the same as becoming aware of dependence as something that matters in times of good health? Moreover, the emphasis on the problematic status of living dependence in family and the solution of making care for those in urgent physical dependence a task of the community at large, has its price. The obvious context in which dependence is discovered is called into question as the fitting context for it. The reasons behind this suspicion clearly make sense. Injustices like the abuse of dependence relations and the unequal distribution of the burden of care should be opposed. Nonetheless, the critical project of countering these injustices needs a constructive side as well, which goes into the question how people can acknowledge their fundamental, everyday dependence and live with it. This side is less elaborated in the dependency critique also because family is not taken into account as a setting that reveals dependence apart from the incidental, largely negative examples. When dependence is pointed out as something for which society at large should take responsibility, focussed on the care for the dependant, does this not lead even more away from an awareness of the fundamental and everyday character of dependence?

These drawbacks of the critical ethical appeal to acknowledge dependence do not mean that these views do not contribute to our search for a more concrete elaboration of the givenness of family. We came across the notion of dependence in the previous chapters, in particular in the arguments of Butler, Ciavatta and Sahlins. There it was also used in a critical argument against a focus in ethics on the free, autonomous individual and corresponding view of morality as transparent, conscious, rational decision-making. The analysis of the dependency critique has deepened our understanding of the critical use of this notion of dependence. The genealogy reveals how dependence was once a common characteristic of all human beings but gradually disappeared out of sight in modernity. It has been dispelled from public life by degrees to the private sphere, where it is invisible. Dependence has become a stigma that affects not only those

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and ageing in order to point out that this work is inevitable in society. On the basis of this insight, a second step can be taken – that is, to reveal human dependence in a fundamental sense (*Love's Labor*, 37–8).

who need care, but also those who perform it, usually women in unpaid or underpaid jobs. In these critical views, dependence is understood as relying on others in cases of illness and fragility. Apart from this deepened insight into the status of dependence, the aim of bringing to light dependence as fundamentally characteristic of the human condition also ties in with our project. It underlines that fundamental relatedness is currently something difficult to live with and thus a topical issue that needs to be addressed. Moreover, the notion of dependence as it is developed here may be related to the given character of relationality. The dependency critique focusses on the position of needing care without having chosen it. It argues against the idea that this position is exceptional. The qualifications of dependence as 'ontological', 'fundamental' or 'inevitable' relate to its 'given' character. Together, these resonances confirm our starting point that family may be understood as a context in which people are pre-eminently confronted with the dependent nature of their being. Dependence then acts as a specification of the more general notion of the givenness of family as it points in particular to the inability to live by oneself and the need for the care of specific others.

The authors we discussed do not elaborate on what family might mean in this way, however, but emphatically oppose it. Family only comes into view as regards the difficulties and injustices of care for dependants. A more conscious accounting for inevitable human dependence thus leads away from family. This impasse relates to the more general tension we perceived between the fundamental and the incidental and negative character of dependence in this research. These tensions reveal how difficult it is to argue in favour of acknowledging fundamental dependence in a positive way within such a critical framework. The idea that understanding family as a context where dependence is lived out could contribute positively to this acknowledgement is immediately rejected because of its uncritical character. As in the case of the criticisms of the earlier chapters, we do not regard this rejection as definitive, but as helping us to better understand our own project. It is by becoming aware of these tensions and impasses in the dependence debate that the need for a different approach to family stands out. Missing from these views is a constructive taking into account of the specific character of family. A constructive approach then means that family is investigated to shed light on the human state of being dependent in a fundamental and neutral sense. As such, the criticisms are extra impulses to investigate whether understanding family as a place where dependence is experienced may be of help in acknowledging its fundamental character. What is more, such an investigation would

contribute to our aim of a more concrete understanding of the given character of family. Again, the constructive investigation of family to gain a better understanding of dependence may still have a critical function. It may contribute to understanding the current difficulties with family and with dependence and to overcome them.

Constructive Approaches to Family as Revealing Fundamental Dependence: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Jean Lacroix

For this constructive purpose, we will first turn to an author well known for his attention to dependence as a fundamental aspect of being human, the German theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Moreover, family has a central place in his ethics. A third relevant aspect is the transcendent character of dependence in his thinking. Unlike Sullivan-Dunbar's theological approach, this transcendent character does not imply an opposition to dependence as lived in the context of family. These aspects make him a suitable candidate to investigate a positive way of relating family and dependence. Again, we will look for the critical potential of such a positive reflection in the two senses used, first its potential to remain critical of any simple confirmation of the status quo, and second its potential to shed light on the current difficult status of family and dependence and to overcome it.

Friedrich Schleiermacher: Fundamental Dependence Positively Related to Family

Just as in the case of Hegel, Schleiermacher's contemporary, we will have to see through the language and family views of Schleiermacher's time in order to arrive at an understanding of his fundamental position and discuss his relevance for our project. His view of family clearly expresses the changes of his German context at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth – that is, from the extended to the nuclear family.[51] This development is accompanied by a less public position of family. The mother became associated with this sphere of family, while the father's role was to leave the family to work in the public domain of politics and the paid economy. Schleiermacher's reflections also bear the signs of an

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[51] Dawn DeVries, 'Be Converted and Become as Little Children: Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Religious Significance of Childhood', in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. by Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 329–49, at 331–4.

increasing interest in education, including the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the innocence of children and the importance of raising children 'according to the genius of nature'.[52] Interpreters do not agree, however, on whether Schleiermacher is a wholehearted supporter of this new family and its corresponding gender roles.[53] This is not the issue we are exploring in his thinking, however. Our interest lies at the systematic level of how he elaborates the relationship between family, dependence and the transcendent perspective.

It is not difficult to recognise in Schleiermacher's thinking the core idea of the dependency critique that dependence should be taken in a fundamental or inevitable sense and as characteristic of being human. Moreover, he also advances this view with a critical aim. Dependence must be acknowledged in order to correct any one-sided view of human beings as autonomous sources of knowledge and acting. For him, however, the one-sidedness does not appear in the concrete injustice of obscured care for the dependant. Schleiermacher's debate takes place from the outset at the level of fundamental anthropological views. In regarding dependence as fundamental, he opposes the idea of being human as resting in oneself as a subject. Moreover, in his view of human beings as existing in a wider connection and being dependent on others, the relation with God is never out of view.[54] This has to do with precisely the fundamental character of dependence. The turn to the subject that took place in Kant's understanding of knowledge and acting is developed by Schleiermacher with a focus on what precedes the subject, the other without which human existence cannot develop. His caution in speaking affirmatively about this 'other' in some kind of metaphysical language again reminds us of Kant. Like Kant, Schleiermacher remains on the side of the phenomena, but, deviating from Kant in a Romantic fashion, Schleiermacher does claim a place for the experience or feeling of the other in addition to knowing and acting. He takes feeling as the most fundamental aspect of subjectivity, underlying knowing and acting, and understands it as characterised by dependence. Feeling is not the result of something people do but of something that happens to them. Feeling corresponds to the human characteristic of receptivity or susceptibility (*Empfänglichkeit*, *Rezeptivität*), which should

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[52] DeVries, 'Be Converted', 334.

[53] DeVries, 'Be Converted', 333n6; Heleen Zorgdrager, *Theologie die verschil maakt: Taal en sekse-differentie als sleutels tot Schleiermachers denken* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003), 118–22.

[54] For a study on the central place of dependence in Schleiermacher's anthropology, philosophy of religion and philosophy of education, see Bruno Laist, *Das Problem der Abhängigkeit in Schleiermachers Anthropologie und Bildungslehre* (Ratingen bei Düsseldorf: A. Henn, 1965).

be distinguished from the other human property of activity (*Tätigkeit*, *Spontaneität*). This openness to being impressed and influenced by something other already has a religious connotation, which Schleiermacher indicates as piety or faith (*Frömmigkeit*). Dependence (*Abhängigkeit*) is, then, the name for the feeling that corresponds to self-consciousness: the awareness of being a subject precisely by being constituted by an 'other' and thus being part of the entirety of reality.

From this brief sketch, it is clear that dependence is central to Schleiermacher's view of being human and that this view implies a transcendent perspective.[55] Reflections on dependence are scattered throughout Schleiermacher's work, and the terminology he uses for it is not uniform.[56] Dependence relates to the concepts of the other, contrariety and the relationship between a part or the particular and the whole (Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 16). Schleiermacher's view of human beings as always dependent on and surrounded by the other is also relevant to his understanding of morality and ethics. The prerequisite of morality is the sense for the other or what is alien and contrary to oneself and the love for unity with the other (14–15). Love is one of the most important subjects of ethics (37). Schleiermacher understands it as an overcoming of the 'absolute split' (*Gespaltenheit*)[57] and 'one-sidedness' that is embodied in particular in the sexed character of being human. Therefore, family also has a crucial place in his ethics, as it is 'the result of sexual difference and connection'.[58] Dependence in this context of marriage and family should not be played off against the absolute dependence of the religious feeling.[59] Love always includes both: love for human beings and for the divine being.

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[55] Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 14.

[56] Laist relates this lack of uniformity to the specific character of Schleiermacher's philosophy, which does not aim to be a comprehensive philosophical system, but employs a heuristic method to construct principles and particularities from a basic attitude of constantly revising himself (*Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 17–18). As a result, his dialectical system remains open in principle, in spite of its desire for inner harmony (19).

[57] 'Die Familie ist "Totalität alles dessen, was sonst nur zerspalten vorhanden ist, der Geschlechter sowohl als der Alter", und damit "eine vollständige Repräsentation der Idee der Menschheit"' (Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 37n173); compare Andreas Arndt, 'Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher: Unendliche Menschheit in der Hülle der Männlichkeit und der Weiblichkeit', in *Geschlechterordnung und Staat: Legitimationsfiguren der politischen Philosophie (1600–1850)*, Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, special volume 27, ed. by Marion Heinz and Sabine Doyé (Berlin: Akademie, 2012), 293–304, at 300.

[58] Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, ed. by Otto Braun and Hans-Joachim Birkner (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1981); *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics 1812–13*, translated by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), §61. We will refer to paragraph numbers, which are similar for the English translation and the German original.

[59] Laist points out this aspect of Schleiermacher's argumentation in his *Psychology* as part of a discussion of religiously motivated celibacy (40–2).

The central importance of family as a place of embodied dependence in Schleiermacher is clearly visible in his *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics* from 1812 to 1813, although the religious connotation is not made explicit there. Nor does Schleiermacher use the term 'dependence' as such. The idea, however, can be easily recognised first of all in how he describes the ethical process. This is the process of reason acting upon and influencing nature in order to become unified with it (§28). This process presupposes that reason is already present in nature (§39–40). This means that the human ability to shape, to know what is good and to act according to it does not start from nowhere. This preceding character of nature may be seen as a primary aspect of the fundamental character of dependence. Schleiermacher also calls this the process of becoming a 'personality' (§58). This development of the given disposition of the personality takes place not in the human being as an isolated individual, but within human community. This is the second way in which the fundamental character of dependence is morally relevant. Schleiermacher takes up the topic of family when elaborating on the ethical importance of the community and dependence.

He states that the germ of all community lies in the family. Family is therefore the first of the 'complete ethical forms' he deals with, the others being race and nationality (§1,6), or, in different terminology, state, academic association, free sociability and church (§66–71).[60] Family reveals that human beings are both individuals and parts of a community in ways that cannot be unravelled. In the context of family, personality is both posited and superseded. Sexuality expresses this personality as something given (§8), but this given individuality implies the drive to community, to become one, as indicated earlier (§10–12). This unity is momentarily present in the act of sexual intercourse, but children represent a permanent unity of life (§12). While the difference between the sexes is a form of nature, reason uses it to 'blur the edges of the one-sidedness of character' (Marginal addition §1). The measure in which 'one-sidedness of sexual character' is 'extinguished' in the marriage while the 'awareness of what is other' grows, indicates its degree of perfection (§23). Together, the spouses build a 'particularity in common' (*gemeinschaftliche Eigenthümlichkeit*) which forms 'the character of the family' (§42–3). This unity leaves room for diversity. The children 'demonstrate a free modification of that family character' (§45). According to Schleiermacher, the

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[60] Eckhardt Preuß views Schleiermacher's attention to the importance of community as contrary to the 'extreme individualism of the Romantics' (Eckhardt Preuß, *Die Stellung und Bedeutung der Familie in der Pädagogik Schleiermachers*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophische Fakultät der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster (Westf.), 1966, 22).

relationship among siblings is the 'highest type of internal sociability' because of the identity established by the unity of the parents and the intuitions the siblings share through 'familial cognition' (§40). The relationship between children and their parents is one of piety (*Pietät*), which means that they never stand above the parents (§47). At the end of his analysis of the 'complete ethical form' of family, Schleiermacher returns to this notion of the piety of the children as the basis of their education (§71). This piety implies obedience. It is not this obedience, however, that the love of the parents for the child aims to develop, but the particularity of the children. The development of the balance between obedience and freedom is identified as the 'basis of all morality' (§73). For the 'technical' elucidation of this ethical education, Schleiermacher refers to the discipline of pedagogy (§74).

In his own elaborations of this pedagogy, we find the explicit understanding of these family forms in terms of a dependence which is also religious – albeit in brief remarks.[61] As is already clear from the character of family as the basic community, education in the spiritual and moral sense is unthinkable without family. Schleiermacher expresses this importance of family explicitly in terms of dependence and the corresponding attitude of obedience. Dependence is understood first of all in terms of the relationship between child and mother. The first confrontation with the other is present in the person of the mother, as a result of which the moral process of becoming a self or personality starts.[62] The facial expressions of the mother towards the young baby arouse in the child the slumbering consciousness characteristic of being human (Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 125). Thus, the love between mother and child comes into existence. This is the basis for all moral being (126). It is also analysed as something natural, not consciously intended (125). Education should be understood precisely as 'arousing' what lies 'slumbering', and that is why this dialogue between mother and baby is crucial for Schleiermacher's view of being human. The dialogue is one of dependence because the mother has personal authority. From the mother, this authority subsequently broadens out towards the entire family (126n223) and implies obedience to the parents. In this natural obedience, which is the result of the feeling of dependence, lies the germ of all respect for community and thus the basis of the possibility of education (127). This includes religious education. The relationship of dependence of children on their parents is also the germ of religious

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[61] For these remarks, see DeVries, 'Be Converted', 349; Hans Van Crombrugge, *Verwantschap en verschil: Over de betekenis van het gezin en de betekenis van het ouderschap in de moderne pedagogiek* (Antwerp: Garant, 1999), 125; Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 127.

[62] See also Preuß, *Stellung und Bedeutung*, 130–3.

dependence (128). In a reflection on how to arouse what lies dormant in the child through religious education, Schleiermacher expresses this crucial role of the experience of dependence concisely: 'Already in the child's first consciousness of his relationship to his parents is religion – it is the spiritual feeling of dependence, and religion is only an enhancement of that.'[63]

The natural character of this dependence and the corresponding attitude of obedience are also emphasised by Schleiermacher in the third of his sermons on the 'discipline' (*Zucht*) of the children in the setting of family.[64] Here, the starting point is the Pauline call to children to 'obey your parents' in the New Testament letter to the Ephesians, which is followed by the 'old divine commandment' (696) to 'honour your father and mother so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth' (Eph. 6:1–3). Schleiermacher interprets these rules as primarily a call to the parents. They must take the honouring or the obedience of the children as an indicator of a good education. If disobedience occurs, this means that the parents have failed in their discipline. Schleiermacher regards this view of the relationship between children and parents as so obvious that he does not think it necessary to 'say much about it' (695). That he nevertheless dedicates an entire sermon to it is because 'everywhere' and 'often' obedience is misinterpreted. It is viewed too strictly as servile fear or too mildly as not in any sense important, or parents think they can make the obedience more easy for their children by relating it to rewards and punishments or by giving good reasons for it. For Schleiermacher, all these attempts to stimulate obedience are incorrect as they are contrary to the natural character of obedience in the setting of family. This means that the only good reason for obedience is to honour the parents. If there were other reasons for it, it would no longer be obedience but respect for one's own reason (698). Obedience, then, arises not out of hope or fear or good reasons, but only out of respect. As such, it is obedience as a natural feeling that is the 'first germ of all good' (698). The

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[63] English translation cited in DeVries, 'Be Converted', 342n33; German original: 'Im ersten Bewußtsein des Kindes von seinem Verhältniß zu den Eltern liegt schon die Religion, es ist das geistige Abhängigkeitsgefühl und die Religion ist nur eine Steigerung davon' (Schleiermacher, *Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt: Aus Schleiermachers handschriftlichem Nachlasse und nachgeschriebenen Vorlesungen*, Sämtliche Werke I/13 (1850; republ. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 412. For references to Schleiermacher's pedagogical writings on family as arousing their slumbering religiosity, see also Preuß, *Stellung und Bedeutung*, 151.

[64] These sermons from 1818 are part of the volume 'Sermons on the Christian Household' ('Predigten über den christlichen Hausstand') published in 1820 (adapted in 1826). We will refer to the edition of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Dritte Abteilung, Predigten*, Vol. 1, ed. by Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2012); translations are mine.

feeling of fundamental dependence is subsequently related to obedience. Schleiermacher speaks of the foundation of the obedience of the children as lying in the 'feeling of the dependence of their existence'. He describes this in associations that remind us of Hosea: 'how they, as they are unable to preserve themselves, always receive what they need, how a protective hand guards them and their abilities develop gradually only by the guidance and cultivation of the elderly' (698–9). This feeling can be cultivated and completed only when the discipline of the parents arouses in the children the notion of all the 'higher human' and the 'most high and sacred' which human beings have. The transcendent character is thus again implied in this notion of dependence. It is the responsibility of the parents to arouse this in their children.

How Critical and Concrete Should a Constructive Approach to Family Be?

From this analysis of passages in Schleiermacher's work that deal with the moral value of family and dependence, it is clear that his project is not that of a critical reappraisal of dependence nor of understanding dependence as a specification of what family might mean. In his ethical, pedagogical and theological reflections, the themes of dependence and family are addressed for different reasons. Dependence is a core theme in his understanding of the relation between human beings and the world, in knowing, acting and feeling. One of the central things the notion expresses is how human beings are open to the other, actively directed at a larger whole. They can position themselves in an interdependent universe and become subjects precisely through being consciously related to this universe. Family, on the other hand, is addressed in Schleiermacher's ethics to indicate where this awareness of oneself as a subject constituted by a larger whole is primarily developed. In the context of family, the love for the other and the desire for unity are given shape in relationships in which people also become individuals. Family members share the specific character of their family but also differ from each other as particular individuals. These particular and communal identities cannot be unravelled in a family. It is not difficult to see that family is thus a place where dependence is lived in a fundamental sense. In his pedagogical thinking, Schleiermacher makes this connection between family and dependence explicit in understanding how consciousness is aroused in the child. Family relations, starting with those with the mother, are crucial in becoming a subject. These relations imply the authority of the parents and obedience to it, and this authority and obedience have to be understood against the background of the

fundamentally dependent character of existence as such. The feeling for the sacred is the encompassing framework by which these concrete dependence relations are shaped. This implies a criticism of dependence relations that are forced. Dependence cannot be controlled.

Schleiermacher's approach to family and dependence is clearly a positive, constructive one. When we relate it to the approaches analysed so far, it creates the impression of a rather massive view of what family means. Is this not an all too easy getting beyond the impasses we observed in the dependency critique? Why precisely is family the germ of all community? Are relationships outside of family not more relevant in learning to live with the other who is radically different from oneself? Does family spontaneously perform this personality building? Moreover, the focus on the relations between the spouses and the foundational role of the mother in education show that Schleiermacher's view of family is congruent with that of his day. Is he not making an absolute of this contingent historical form? This would, moreover, render it immune to critical views that disclose the flaws or even injustices that this model of family may incorporate. Is Schleiermacher's view of family life not precisely an exponent of the privatised, nonpublic type in which women perform invisible and unacknowledged tasks which primarily concern caring, something that may easily place them in a marginalised position? Furthermore, the idea that the right kind of dependence develops naturally in a family seems to give rise to all the criticisms of the language of the natural discussed in Chapter 3. Finally, the close relations between the natural and the sacred recall Browning's problematic use of religious symbols as reinforcements of natural tendencies.

The dangers of a massive view of family are clear. Schleiermacher's constructive view runs these risks just as Hegel's does. In comparison to the problems of the references to nature in Almond and Browning, however, it is important to note the difference in framework and elaboration. Schleiermacher's reflection on family is not inspired by worries over its decline, nor does it aim to safeguard some specific traditional view of family against new forms. At stake in his reflection is the ethical perfection which originates in taking human dependence into account, and this is a critical ethical view insofar as it is a correction of a dominant theory of morality as primarily elaborated in terms of an autonomously thinking and acting subject. Nor does Schleiermacher univocally characterise family as natural. The references to nature primarily concern the differences between the sexes. This natural distinction between male and female is, however, precisely what should be overcome in the context of family. This

is why family is the first of the 'complete ethical forms'. Thus, nature as such is not good but reflects the pre-moral situation of being split (*Gespaltenheit*). The ways in which family can overcome this being split are again not indicated in detail, but only in the rather general notions of sexual intercourse, the possibility of the new life of the child, and in the relationship between siblings.[65] These phenomena are never meant, however, as a complete solution to the problem of the split between the sexes. The unity is never fully realised, nor does such an absolute idea have a place in Schleiermacher's ethics.[66] Moreover, his references to the natural character of lived dependence in family seem to point out primarily that it cannot be controlled. This aspect is reinforced by the transcendental understanding of dependence. Dependence is thus also a delicate matter, and Schleiermacher is all but unaware of the dangers of forced authority and obedience. These aspects nuance the massive impression of his constructive approach.

We also analysed Schleiermacher with an eye to the second sense of the critical potential, the insight such a constructive approach can give into the difficulties of acknowledging and living this fundamental dependence in the setting of family, in particular in modernity. The passages on family do not deal with this issue explicitly. Rather, topics that are controversial in modernity, like authority and obedience, are presented as self-evident. Moreover, the passages we analysed discuss these topics in a general, fundamental way with an eye to the development of morality in human beings. On the whole, family life is painted in very general representations like marriage, the relation between siblings or the earliest forms of child education. This is done in brief, assertive statements. The specific character of family relations is not pointed out by comparison to other relations. The contribution of these reflections to our aim to find a more concrete view of what it means to take family as given while respecting its nature as mystery is thus limited. On the other hand, they also give rise to the question of how concrete such a view should be. If Schleiermacher would have specified his general view of family as an important moral context, this would have resulted in an even more detailed representation of good family life, which would inevitably display the characteristics of the values of his time. From the outset of our project, we have emphasised the danger of thus

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[65] This view does imply that same-sex relations are completely unthinkable in this context. Schleiermacher regards them as unnatural and thus impossible to relate to morality; compare *Ethics*, §25. He also presupposes a monogamous view of marriage (1816 marginal addition to §1).

[66] Zorgdrager, *Theologie die verschil maakt*, 112, referring to Schleiermacher's *Brouillon zur Ethik* (1805–6).

limiting reflection on family and aimed – with Gabriel Marcel – for an understanding of the constant elements in the different family forms. Given this danger, Schleiermacher's lack of specification is also an advantage. Moreover, it may be interpreted as corresponding to the character of family as mystery. Schleiermacher's attention to the impossibility of controlling the positive role of family in morality may also be seen as a sensitivity to its character as mystery. This sensitivity is supported by attention to the larger transcendent perspective on fundamental dependence.

The limited contribution of Schleiermacher on these points incites us, however, to explore another view which accounts for them more explicitly. A small text on family by the French philosopher Jean Lacroix (1900–86) clearly shows similarities with Schleiermacher and Hegel as regards the constructive character of his approach to family. Lacroix does, however, specify the distinct character of family in highlighting an everyday family practice. This practice relates to the issue of dependence, which he also discusses critically as a difficult issue for his time. In becoming more concrete, however, Lacroix emphasises the aspect of mystery that should remain primary in reflection on family. We therefore analyse Lacroix's reflections as a final contribution to our attempt to specify the givenness of family.

Jean Lacroix: The Mystery of Family and the Limits to Its Specification

Jean Lacroix is a French philosopher who belongs to the same group of Catholic philosophers as Gabriel Marcel.[67] In the preface of his book, *Force et faiblesses de la famille* (1948), his approach to family already recalls Marcel when he formulates his aims as 'understanding the mystery of family from within and exploring the specific being of family' (9).[68] This 'understanding from within' seems to parallel Marcel's view of mystery as an issue in which one is personally involved. Lacroix distinguishes this approach of 'becoming acquainted with family' from others that bring to mind what Marcel calls problem approaches – although Lacroix's references to mystery do not mean that he avoids the term 'problem' in relation to his own

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[67] Lacroix published a book on Marcel's philosophy called *L'Existentialisme de Gabriel Marcel* (Paris: Le Semeur, 1946). Lacroix is connected with the French movement of personalism more emphatically than Marcel is. Pierre Bréchon characterises the personalist view of family as reconciling the 'anarchist' emphasis on love and the 'traditionalist' one on institution in *La famille*. Apart from Lacroix, Bréchon refers to Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Madinier and Gabriel Marcel as exponents of this personalist strand of philosophy (149–67).

[68] '[C]omprendre du dedans le mystère de la famille, de pénétrer l'être familial' (Jean Lacroix, *Force et faiblesses de la famille* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948), 9; English translations are mine).

aims. They consist in defending or attacking family (7, 8) or understanding its utility (12). Lacroix's aim, however, is to reveal the essence of family. It is not about approaching family from outside as an object, but about entering into its intimacy. These general characterisations reveal the constructive character of his reflection. His interest lies in the distinct nature of family.

Lacroix regards this approach as far from easy. In his elaboration of this difficulty, the critical character of his discussion of family becomes immediately visible. The difficulty concerns the reigning prejudices and resentments regarding family. These are rooted in what he calls the 'problem of the father' or rather the problem of 'what to oppose to the values of fatherhood' (9). For modern human beings who aim for liberation and emancipation, family, particularly the father, has become 'the main obstacle for their deepest desires and most necessary requirements' (13). The rejection of fatherhood is paralleled by a search for brotherhood (23). This horizontalising movement becomes visible in the political organisation of the sovereignty of the people (30), but also in the sense of the sacred, which no longer lies in fatherly authority but in brotherly community (33–4). The origin of this rejection of fatherhood and longing for brotherhood at the existential level is the paradoxical desire to be innocent (35). It is the desire to free oneself from the guilt of being a son – that is, of becoming a personality in distinction from and even in resistance to the father.[69] Lacroix understands his time as one of individualism. Becoming an independent individual means rejecting the ancestors in all their contingency and emphasising one's creative powers over against what one receives (35). This is the most fundamental level of the emancipating movement of modernity. Life then becomes an 'ongoing liberation'. Lacroix formulates this desire for innocence in terms of independence as well: 'As human beings are primarily dependent upon their parents, any movement towards independence must turn against the parents' (37). For Lacroix, the difficulty of modernity is how this entitlement to independence and autonomy – which means progress for humanity as such – can be reconciled with the acknowledgement of the fact and the value of being dependent (43). This is precisely the question at stake in the issue of family. All modern difficulties with being dependent come together in the phenomenon of family. Lacroix's aim is thus not to solve these problems, but to illuminate them by analysing family as mystery. His constructive approach clearly has critical aims in the second sense just indicated.

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[69] 'C'est contre son père que l'homme sent le besoin de conquérir l'autonomie de sa personnalité et sa valeur propre' (Lacroix, *Force et faiblesses*, 35).

Lacroix's acknowledgement of family as mystery does not stand in the way of an analysis that refers to concrete everyday life. He starts his reflections from what may be called a concrete act or practice, which he portrays as the 'most intimate mystery of being human' (43). It is the mystery of confession (*aveu*). To introduce this practice, Lacroix first identifies the distinct character of family as the peculiar joining of the individual and the social. This focus brings to mind not only our analyses of Hegel and Schleiermacher, but also of the views of kinship anthropology. Like Hegel, Lacroix emphasises that this interwovenness of being an individual and part of a community is possible thanks to the private character of family. Family is the sphere of the private which protects the individual against the claims and unrest of the public world. Lacroix analyses his time as one in which the public is seen as having higher value than the private (48). This may sound counterintuitive since individualism seems to entail a privileging of the values of the intimate. Within an individualist framework, these values are only appreciated insofar as they are developed in the individual and outside of all social relations. Family, on the other hand, reveals that the sphere of the 'concealed, private and intimate' is not just individual, but also social and as such, necessary for being a person. In family, I become a person in a secluded sphere, protected against the 'immodest gazing' of outsiders (49). This lack of a public character is what Lacroix calls the 'modesty' or 'reticence' (*pudeur*) of family (49). It is important to see that this lack is not a failure but an intrinsic quality of family: what happens in the sphere of family does not need to be made public. Family is the place where things do not need to be expressed in order to be understood and shared; they remain hidden. Without this seclusion, intimacy cannot exist. This intimacy has no other goal or intention than the relationship or unity of the persons involved (50). It is in these relationships that people can become persons. The development of the individual and the social thus go hand in hand. One becomes a subject by transcending oneself in relationships to others (51–2). Family reveals that people become subjects by being ever more related to the other.

The mystery of confession is subsequently identified as the specific act in which this combination of 'intimacy and sociability' is most completely present (54). The meaning of this act is of fundamental importance for Lacroix's view of being human. This act is the 'deepest' and 'best expression of being human' because it expresses 'human greatness and weakness', or 'merit and fault' (*mérite et faute*) (54). Lacroix thus uses the notion of confession as referring to the unity of what is usually distinguished as the

confession of love and of fault or guilt. He relates the act first of all to the spouses' confessing to each other. This means they search for a complement in the other that makes them more, completes them and revives them (54–5). This is their love for each other. The desire for completeness should not to be understood in an egoistical sense, which would again imply an approach to family or marriage in terms of utility – here, useful for the well-being of the individual (55). Rather, the mutual confession implies sacrifice by both spouses. Confessing to each other also means confession to a transpersonal reality, higher than the spouses themselves (56, 64, 66, 68). This is the 'we' or 'us' of family, the unity of family to which one puts oneself in the service, a new reality (64–6). It is embodied in an objective way in the child. The possibility of having a child is as such enough to call family into existence (65, 68–9).

In Lacroix's analysis of confession, the notion of dependence returns. When confession is seen in the aforementioned way as constitutive of marriage, a perspective on dependence arises that does away with modern, pejorative connotations (56). This is no longer dependence in the sense of the child's dependence on the dominant, powerful father. Family is the place where human relationships are no longer determined by the will to possess the other, or by the struggle to death, which Lacroix regards – referring to Hegel – as the primary kind of human relationship (56–7). This struggle is inverted in family into a reciprocal recognition (58). In this setting, being a child is not so much being dependent, but being recognised and thus having a basis for 'true existence'. I no longer search for the other to possess him or her, but to make myself 'voluntarily into a slave and servant of the other' in a 'complete surrender' (58, 66). This way of recognising the other as other may result in a similar inversion in the other, so that recognition becomes reciprocal. Lacroix relates this reciprocal confession explicitly to marriage. It is only to the person I love and who loves me that I confess. This confession is 'sacred' and a 'true oath' (62). Confessing to the one I love is an oath to continue this revelation of myself to the other, to whom I have bound myself by the act of confession. The confession is inherently continuous and thus indissoluble. Family consists in an enduring which is nourished by 'the eternal' and which is therefore a history, a creation in this enduring (53). 'The longer family lasts, the more it realises itself', according to Lacroix. Relationships both between the spouses and with the children are relationships of dependence (74). Being born means being born into a family, and this means both biological and social or spiritual dependence. Lacroix concludes his reflection on confession, however, by stating that the 'true mystery of family' consists in

that 'everything the children receive does not increase their dependence but their independence'. He calls this the 'drive for life' (*l'élan de vie*) which makes children become persons by participating more and more in communal life (75), which continues in the 'world outside' – that is, outside of family. Family prepares children for this world by making them social beings who are open to this world.

Reticence and Family as Mystery

Lacroix's approach to family turns out to be a constructive one, also in relation to the theme of dependence. Family is the pre-eminent context in which the fundamental character of dependence comes to light, at least in our time. This analysis is also a critical one in the second sense mentioned earlier. For dependence as lived in a family is the core stumbling block of modernity. From the perspective of the modern project of liberation and individuality, the phenomenon of family embodies precisely that from which it aims to free human beings. That does not mean that a revaluation of family or a reappraisal of dependence as lived in the context of family is the solution to the problem of modern difficulties with dependence. Instead of such a 'problem approach', Lacroix engages in understanding what family might mean. This is apparently what he regards as his contribution as a philosopher to a better way of dealing with being dependent. This understanding, however, is one in the mode of mystery. Does this make a difference in comparison to Schleiermacher's constructive approach? Is Lacroix's view of family not also a massive one in the sense that it suggests that family by itself, necessarily, has all these positive contributions to make to being human and becoming a person? His more specific elaboration of the distinct character of family may make his view even more liable to this criticism. Is Lacroix's not precisely the idealised view of family that we have tried to avoid from the outset of our study?

The title of Lacroix's book suggests that he is not blind to the *faiblesses*, the weaknesses, of family. This critical view of family is, however, based on his constructive analysis. It is precisely in the distinct character of the privateness of family that Lacroix localises its weakness. He admits that, in practice, family is often a community that is anything but open and positively related to the world. He points to this closed character as being just as self-evident as its openness. This may be understood as referring to its inherently nonpublic and reticent character. Lacroix points out that, because family is a closed community, it can become too close-knit (112–13). Then it becomes a threat

to society. This happens when family is viewed as always having priority. Such a view hinders the 'giving of oneself': the other and the world outside are excluded, and intimacy means nothing more than narrow-mindedness. Therefore, Lacroix concludes that family itself is never as such the aim of being related. The aim lies beyond it: 'there is something that goes beyond every human community, and that cannot be denied without failing to recognise the community and degrading it' (116). Lacroix uses terms like 'life itself', 'the Other', 'the Absolute' and 'God' to speak of this higher dimension. The family Lacroix defends should be open to this transcendent dimension, but this also means an openness to concrete other communities. Groups should mix and never become absolute themselves (117).

These last remarks again point to the dimension of the sacred which is also implied in Marcel's notion of mystery. It is in the sacred dimension of life itself that Lacroix localises the critical impulse in the first sense we distinguished – that is, to unmask idealised or absolutising views of family. However, this is not a critical perspective in the sense found in Sullivan-Dunbar's ultimate human dependence on God. She introduces the relationship with the transcendent as a guarantee of the fundamental human equality of which human relations always fall short. An approach that constructively relates the transcendent perspective to the lived reality of family life, like Lacroix's, would, in her view, fail to take into account the flawed nature of family. This is not what Lacroix regards as the central danger of a constructive approach to family. The risk of failing to recognise the possible corruptive character accompanies any constructive understanding of aspects of life as structures or givens. For Lacroix, the real danger is that of a view that fails to acknowledge the specific weakness inherent in family – that is, precisely its private character, its reticence (*pudeur*). This nourishes a tendency towards seclusion. An awareness of a broader perspective of relatedness which 'goes beyond every human community' but is also implied in it should guard against this tendency inherent in family. The awareness of a transcendent perspective may keep family on the safe side of its hidden nature. It is, moreover, an awareness that is given precisely through family. Lacroix speaks of a 'close connection between the *hidden* and the *sacred*, a hiddenness and a sacredness that are able to unite the intimate with the social'. Precisely as the 'guard of the sacred', family is the 'defender of the private'.[70]

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[70] 'Ainsi se manifeste le lien intime du *secret* et du *sacré*, d'un secret et d'un sacré qui savent unir intimité et socialité: si la famille est la *défense de privé*, c'est qu'elle est la *gardienne du sacré*' (Lacroix, *Force et faiblesses*, 146).

In Lacroix's elaboration of family as mystery a dimension is addressed that has not yet been acknowledged explicitly in these terms so far. It concerns the private, hidden, reticent character of family. Of course, the dependency critique also noticed this, but only in the negative sense of a problematic aspect which contributed to the obfuscation of dependence. Lacroix describes it in a more fundamental and neutral sense as reticence, as what is 'non-revealed', in the sense of that 'which needs no revelation to be revealed, no expression to be expressed' (49). He contrasts this awareness of the non-revealed to Hegel's project in which everything in principle is to be revealed, open, public. He refers to Kierkegaard for the idea that the 'internal can never be completely revealed', remains hidden and cannot be communicated. This elaboration of the mystery character deepens our understanding of why it is difficult to describe or analyse what family might mean. It is an unnameability that follows from its inherently hidden character. This character also puts a limit on our quest for a specification of the givenness of family, although not in the sense that these boundaries can be formulated in general. On the other hand, Lacroix's argument does give the remarkable specification of the act of confession. He does not elaborate on this act by giving concrete examples of it apart from 'confession to each other' in marriage. He only becomes more concrete in contrasting the latter to the confession of guilt by the criminal in a public setting (59–60). Here, confession does not fit. The criminal confesses guilt in a longing to free him- or herself of its burden and leave it behind. But it is precisely by this act of confession that society comes to regard him or her as a dangerous, guilty person. Lacroix contrasts confession in the private sphere of family to this paradox of the confession in the public sphere. In the context of family, the confession may be understood as the start of being freed from guilt. Then the confession is answered and thus reciprocal.

Lacroix's attention to the private, hidden character of family also relates to one of the tensions or impasses identified in the dependency critique. This critique localises the dangers of care for dependants in the private, hidden sphere of family, as we have seen. It aims to prevent and resolve these dangers primarily by making family transparent and broadening responsibility for the dependant to the public sphere. We noticed that in doing so, this critique could no longer account positively for the fact that dependence is lived first of all in the setting of family. Lacroix's view supports our analysis that this drive for transparency and public responsibility is at odds with dependence itself as it is discovered in the setting of family. Moreover, Lacroix indicates a direction for overcoming this impasse. For his constructive account of

family, the concrete practice of confession is crucial. In this practice, the combination of 'intimacy and sociability' which characterises family is most completely present. Furthermore, it is a practice of everyday life and not of extreme situations. He calls it 'the most intimate mystery of being human'. In the conclusion, we will focus again on this mystery character of family and dependence. What has the attention paid to this contributed to the aim of this chapter, which is to specify givenness, especially with regard to its moral weight?

Conclusion: Overcoming the Impasses of Dependence by Mystery

In this chapter, we focussed on the notion of dependence to specify what the inextricable sharing of each other's life among family members means concretely. Does this notion help make the active attitude of 'answering' to the given character of family, which we found at the end of Chapter 3, more concrete? To gain insight into the current status of dependence in ethical reflection we focussed on the arguments found in the dependency critique. Of course, these arguments are not limited to the circles of this debate. As in the case of Butler, Almond, Browning and the kinship anthropologists, it is easy to recognise patterns of thinking in their arguments that are also more widely present in Western society and public opinion. The analysis of the dependency critique confirmed that, in our time, family is a pre-eminent context in which people are confronted with the dependent nature of their being. The critical reflections on the hiddenness of dependence often referred to family as the setting that pre-eminently reveals that people cannot live by themselves and need specific others to care for them. The critique also made us aware of the difficulties of living with dependence. It easily leads to asymmetry, power abuse and exploitation. Moreover, the dependency critique confirmed that these experiences of dependence are even more confrontational in our time: people have difficulty acknowledging dependence due to a dominant focus on the struggle for equality and primary interest in the autonomy of human beings and the value of independence.

The analysis of the dependency critique also revealed, however, that an awareness of this fundamental and current difficulty of living with dependence does not mean that one can free oneself from it. Although the critique emphasises the fundamentally dependent nature of being human as such, at the same time, it associates dependence with youth and old age, illness and other limitations. In particular, it starts from situations of dependency care in the extreme and partly problematic cases like chronic illness or

severe mental disability. As a result, it does not contribute to relating dependence to so-called healthy everyday life or care in less extreme settings, such as the upbringing of children who do not suffer from severe limitations. This is even more so the case because of the suspicion against the context in which dependence is most visible as an everyday reality: family. To put it in the terms of Chapter 3: the dependency critique does not approach family as a given that asks for an answer which takes shape within this specific relationship. Rather, dependency relations are broadened to society as a whole, which should share in the responsibilities of family members for care in particular. This elaboration of the current difficulty of living with dependence thus leads to several impasses, as we have noted. These impasses point to the need for an approach in which the permanent and everyday character of dependence is accounted for as well as family as a context in which this character pre-eminently comes to light. As we have seen in the other chapters, though, it is not easy to overcome the impasses. Getting beyond them too easily would ignore that they reveal important risks of emphasising the dependent nature of being human. What has our mystery approach yielded regarding an alternative understanding of dependence?

Getting beyond the Impasses

First, the distinction between 'problem' and 'mystery' found in Marcel makes us aware of the 'problem' character of critical approaches to dependence. Concrete situations like having a child who is severely mentally challenged or experiencing the losses of old age and the problems of care related to them are frequent incentives for such critical reflections. Dependence is thus something problematic in people's personal life; that is the first reason for reflecting on it. The second reason is its obfuscation in society, as well as in theory. The reality of people who are permanently, utterly dependent is not acknowledged, and the work of the people who care for them remains invisible and underpaid. Moreover, its invisibility makes this work a likely context for abuse both for the dependent person and the carer. Marcel's notion of problem – as distinct from mystery – characterises approaches to a topic as a clearly demarcated object in order to arrive at an understanding of it and find a solution to its difficulty that are generally understandable and acceptable. This implies a movement of objectification from one's own involvement in the topic. This is precisely what can be observed in the critical approaches to dependence. Although reflection mostly starts from personal involvement in care for dependent

family members, the topic is subsequently analysed in such a way that it is clearly demarcated and becomes recognisable to outsiders. Moreover, dependence is analysed by distinguishing different problems in it with the aim of solving them. The first problem is that dependence is not generally acknowledged as fundamental to being human, and the solution is to make people aware of its ontological character. The other problem is that of the invisible care which can be changed by telling the stories of care for the dependant and by developing systems of collective responsibility for the dependant. These imply an opening up of the closed, hidden sphere of family. Thus, family as a setting in which people live with dependence is also mainly approached as a problem to overcome.

The contours of a mystery approach become visible in comparison to the problem approach. A mystery approach means a different way of dealing with the difficulties of recognising dependence. The dominance of modern views of the human being as autonomous and the closed nature of family would be equally recognised as factors that make it difficult to live with dependency. The aim of the reflection would not be to counter this dominance and closedness in the aforementioned way. Our mystery approach does not aim at becoming aware of one's fundamental dependence in the sense of a potentiality that might become actual or at making responsibility for dependent people a collective one beyond the setting of family. Approaching dependence as mystery means regarding the difficulty of understanding and experiencing dependence as lying at a deeper level than explanations of its modern and family-related character reveal. Dependence is something in which people are very much 'involved', which is so constitutive of being human that it is hard to fathom. As in the case of the family tie and the givenness of family discussed in Chapter 3, dependence cannot be placed as a topic at a distance from oneself in order to clarify it as a well-demarcated theme. It is not a fact that should be acknowledged and, from that moment on, be incorporated into, for example, political views of systems of care. The suggestion that what is needed is to face up to the fact of dependence paradoxically leads to the very risks the dependency critique so clearly highlights. It could easily suggest a resignation to the injustices to which dependence could lead. Recognising it as a fact also creates a tension with the importance of independence. By thus emphasising the ontological character of dependence, the critical awareness results in the aforementioned impasses. The critical approaches reveal the need for a different awareness or recognition of dependence, one that can account for its inscrutability. How can a mystery approach be elaborated in which this recognition does not lead

to an uncritical obscuring of the risks? Moreover, how could such an approach meet our aim of giving a more specific, concrete understanding of the moral weight of the givenness of family?

Again, the impasses we observed in the dependency critique indicate ways of elaborating this mystery character. What would a reflection look like that does not start from the setting of care, but emphatically from that of family as the context in which dependence is most obvious? First it would not evoke dependence as something incidental, but as something permanent. Being a family means being dependent on each other in different ways that change during the course of life and as a result of specific occurrences. This changing character does not do away with dependence as such. Even when people are no longer in contact with their family or when all family members have died, there is a real sense of dependence. Family members remain a crucial part of one's identity; they are persons without whom one cannot think or understand oneself. Second, becoming aware of dependence does not start from imagining extreme situations of dependence like illness, but from trivial, everyday reality. Dependence in the family setting is about the practical organisation of a family with young children, which is experienced – as often pointed out – as extremely hectic in our time. It is about caring for older parents, for aunts and uncles, for grandparents who are not ill but no longer can manage daily life entirely by themselves or whose social life becomes complicated as they are no longer mobile. Third, the reason to strive for a better understanding of dependence would not be the risks of injustice implied in it. The impulse would be its obscure character in a neutral sense, preceding, as it were, the level of the right or wrong ways of allowing for it. This obscurity is reflected in what Lacroix calls the reticence of family. This neutral understanding of dependence is necessary for becoming aware of the potential dangers of misuse, but it also gives insight into its possible beneficial effects.

This threefold sketch might create the impression that a concise summary of dependence as visible in the family setting can be easily formulated. Is this what ethics should do? The core of our argument is that this should be done in the mode of mystery. To make one aware of the difficulty of speaking about what family might mean and to take it into account in one's reflection on the moral character of family, ethics must evoke this mystery character. This means that dependence cannot easily be described as a fact that can be proved or of which people should be convinced. Nor can it be made neatly explicit in an overview of rights and duties to which all family members should adhere. It is also not something people should be called to, as implied

in MacIntyre's 'virtues of acknowledged dependence'.[71] Ethical approaches along these lines were found in the dependency critique, but they lead to impasses, as we have seen.

These impasses have parallels outside academic debates, in common patterns of thinking about family and care. On the one hand, the high costs of public care have led many Western countries to a reduction of it and a rehabilitation of informal care. Family members are the most likely candidates for such care. The same holds for public and informal child care. Being a family thus self-evidently means being responsible for care. Why is this? Somehow it is obvious that family members depend on each other. This is also clearly visible in the bottom line of family support by social workers to keep families together as long as possible despite the risks. On the other hand, this dependence is questioned: is family the best place for raising children or is it important to have it accompanied by the expertise of outsiders, which implies that interference is in principle allowed? Elderly people indicate that they prefer not to be a 'burden' to their children and avoid situations of intimate care like being washed or changed. Euthanasia laws in the Netherlands and Belgium guarantee that the family is not involved in an individual's decision to have euthanasia. These examples show that family is both approached with suspicion and presupposed as the self-evident context of care.

It is precisely in relation to this impasse that the value of a mystery approach stands out. Approaching dependence as lived in the family setting as mystery would imply becoming aware of the strength of the appeal of the family tie without immediately evaluating it in a moral sense. It would make us aware of how hard it is to evaluate this appeal. This is crucial to understanding both the suspicion of family and the self-evident endorsement of its value. Precisely because of this difficulty of coming to grips with dependence, roles, responsibilities and claims operate in the context of family on the level of unconscious yet strong presuppositions and traditions. This level asks for sensitivity on the part of people whose job it is to support families in trouble. Moreover, a mystery approach enables a distinctively ethical view. The aversion to becoming dependent or the interpretation of dependence as becoming a burden to one's relatives is easily explained in psychological terms as related to feelings of guilt or shame. An ethical approach to these phenomena in the mode of mystery points to a level that is not addressed in such a psychological perspective – that is, the level of fundamental interrelatedness. Moral appeals cannot be understood or evaluated without taking this level into account.

[71] See p. 253.

Evoking the Mystery in Conceptual Ethical Reflection

From the start, we have aimed for a mystery approach with enough critical potential to counter the risks of a focus on givenness and dependence: a sanctioning of the status quo. Is this critical potential alive in our mystery approach to dependence so far? Can the way we have evoked it, starting from the impasses, not easily be interpreted as suggesting that dependence on family members is something one cannot escape and should accept? This suggestion does not completely miss the point, but it sounds of course rather plain and with no sense of the deeply problematic consequences this dependence may have, in particular in the case of abusive family relationships. Again, it is important to point out the evocative character of indicating the mystery. This is why we started this chapter once more with a literary text. The living family image of Hosea evokes the mystery in such a way that it brings to light dependence as lying at the heart of being human. If this heart is neglected, society begins to fall apart and the door to injustice is opened. Hosea also reveals this dependence as something which family embodies, but it is not limited to family. The image of the family should rather evoke the broader ties of interdependence among all life. Moreover, it is the image of a *restored* family life that evokes this interdependence. The restoration is associated with the flourishing of nature and an untroubled enjoying of its life-giving power.

Going back to the literary evocation of the theme of family and dependence raises the question of whether such an image can have a parallel in the conceptual language of critical, academic reflections as we have analysed them. That seems impossible. The Hosean imagery, for example, would easily become a naive, romantic idea that moreover suggests a moral guideline that focusses on restoring family relationships. That does not mean that this literary evocation has no value as an image, however. It is no coincidence that, in Hosea, this very image of a restored family is used to highlight a wider dependence. The restored family implies both the reality of the difficulty of family life as living dependence, its failure, and the utter joy of its thriving. Experiencing such a restoration may be a summary of the good life and confirm that dependence can be lived in an attitude of trust. It is precisely therefore that the failure experienced in family life has such deep existential impact. It questions whether life can be trusted.

Evoking the mystery of family dependence in relation to everyday life in a critical conceptual ethical reflection is clearly difficult, if not impossible. What about the constructive approaches we analysed in Schleiermacher and Lacroix? Does such evocation have a place there? Can they be seen as

attempts to incorporate this joyful image of a restored family in a reflective approach? Both Schleiermacher and Lacroix are interested in the distinct moral character of family relationships. This is already an important difference to a critical approach. This moral character is not described in a direct way in the form of a picture of a good family, though. Schleiermacher relates family life to fundamental human character traits of being open to and dependent on the other. In family life, this basic anthropological given is shaped. It is the first setting in which people experience the sense for the other, a longing for unity with the other, being guided by an other whom one can trust. This conceptual exploration of the moral character of family does not aim to show how dependence should function or can be controlled in families, however. It can also be said that the reflection takes the form of an evocation, in that it reveals the natural presence of dependence in the family context. It reveals it as a mystery. This mystery is embedded in the most fundamental mystery of human life, that of its dependence on God. Schleiermacher's reflections on dependence thus enable a different kind of awareness of the distinct moral character of family than results from the critical views. Such reflections may contribute to understanding the self-evidence by which family is regarded as the primary community on whom people may depend. This obviousness has roots in the basic, human constitution but is therefore also hard to understand. It is hard to find expressions which can indicate what people are so 'involved in'.

Lacroix's reflections subsequently address the second way in which dependence is hard to understand: that it is the aspect of life that modernity most vehemently takes offence at. To the modern resistance against family as hindering independence, Lacroix opposes an understanding of dependence as found in the pre-eminently familial act of confession. He does this again, however in the mode of mystery that does not describe, state, or call for this dependence, but evokes it. Imagining the act of confession, Lacroix points to dependence as a complete surrender to the other which is answered by the other with a similar giving of oneself. It is the dependence of reciprocal recognition by means of which people become persons. This recognition requires a specific setting: the private one of family. Here we find again the interest in the distinct moral character of family. Precisely because it is a nonpublic sphere, characterised by reticence, dependence can be lived here in ways that contribute positively to becoming a person. On the other hand, this reticence also harbours the weakness of family. The danger that a family becomes a closed community, focussed only on its own values, is real. The awareness

of this undisclosed character of family life ties in with its character as mystery and deepens the ways in which we have elaborated it so far. It implies a feeling for the sacred: it is in the hidden sphere of family that the larger, transcendent perspective on life may be traced.

By focussing on dependence as a specification of the givenness of family, this sense of the sacred also becomes more concrete. In the context of family, one may experience givenness as a fundamental dependence which fosters life. This experience can shape people to be open to the other, which presupposes a fundamental trust. Family can also be a context that hinders being shaped to this openness and trust, when family becomes a place of conflict and abuse, as well as when families are too close-knit or viewed as always having priority. Such a view hinders the 'giving of oneself' and thus a real dependence. This possibility does not mean that family as such is, because of its closed character, a hindrance to openness and trust. It may become such a hindrance when the dependence of the family sphere is not related to the Other or God that 'goes beyond every human community, and that cannot be denied without failing to recognise the community and degrading it' (116). An open family is a real possibility and means first of all an openness to this transcendent dimension, which implies an openness to communities outside the family. It is clear that this is a different openness than the transparency for which many critical views of family argue.

It is precisely this relation between the specific moral character of family and its openness to a sacred dimension that we also traced in the way family figures as an image in Hosea. A broken family is imagined in this prophecy, but the prophetic call expressed in this image is not simply the call to restore the family relationship with God. The broken family is an image of a missing trust in life among believers. As such, the image also contains the germ of a restoration of family relations. This germ is not the family tie itself, but its renewal by means of acknowledging a fundamental dependence on God. The family image thus reveals a more encompassing interdependence of all life and its basis in God. This also enables a different way of dealing with the concrete dependence of the family setting itself. Because of the larger framework of dependence in which family is embedded, the failure or brokenness of the family itself is not final. The power of restoration does not lie in the family itself but is a gift. This gift, however, presupposes family as a given: because family relationships cannot be undone, they can be restored. It is crucial that this restoration is not one of acknowledging one's dependence upon family members and accepting it. It is an acknowledgement of dependence that – as in the case of the active attitude implied in givenness – initiates a creative giving shape to

family, because family is not itself the source of a good dependence. This source is sacred, beyond one's control. Sensitivity to the sacred as the basis of a trust in life is what the image in Hosea evokes. This sensitivity has a clear critical power to unmask the patterns that hide dependence and focus one-sidedly on the power to build and control. It also stimulates a creative shaping of dependence because of the acknowledgement of ultimate dependence as life-giving. The image shows that dependence should not be suspected as such. Thus, the image discloses family as the basic setting in which this creativity shapes moral life. A mystery approach is needed to evoke this image of family and dependence in ethics.

Morality of Appeal and Answer
Ethics and the Sacred Character of Family as Mystery

Ethics and Everyday Life

Ethics is always on the lookout for moments when life no longer appears to be self-evident, when it is no longer obvious what one should think and how one should act, when daily routine is disturbed. This attentiveness may easily create a perverted impression of morality. The questions of good and evil seem to arise first of all in relation to this interrupted life and not to life in its everyday routine, the familiar everyday reality. By taking family as its object, this study aims for a different ethical approach. It does not localise the ethical relevance of the theme of family primarily in concrete, hot issues like divorce, same-sex couples or the familial duty to care or to donate organs. Its focus is on what family might mean as an everyday reality, something all people are all familiar with, even though they live their family lives in completely different ways. This means we do not start with asking what a good family should be or how family members should behave, but with what it might mean to be members of a family. This implies an open view as regards different forms of family life. Family is where people experience it.

Why is family in its everyday character a theme that is relevant to ethics? Because moral problems rise not only in relation to the well-known exceptional hard cases, but mostly in everyday life. Here people also experience the special appeal of family members. In the context of family, they are responsible for each other, for the upbringing of their own children as well as for orphaned grandchildren, grandnieces or nieces like Ruth and Lucille. Here they have duties of care, sometimes even for relatives they have never met. The family tie thus lies at the basis of many moral expectations, but why? Why do people feel strongly responsible for family members, or why does the law hold them responsible even if they do not feel this? This basis seems mostly self-evident – it is only when one experiences a conflict of appeals that one may start to ponder or

question it. That this moral character is largely self-evident implies a difficulty for ethical reflection. For it turns out to be difficult to formulate what the family tie might mean. It is this difficulty that we have taken as the starting point of our ethical reflection because we think it is crucial for any reflection on family. How can reflection allow for it? This became the first leading question of our investigation.

The second reason to focus ethical attention on what family might mean as an everyday reality lies in its controversial status. Many experience family as a field where great changes have taken place in the past fifty years. Although many people marry, it is no longer an obvious choice. The same holds for having children. In many north-western European countries, taking care of elderly parents is no longer an obvious task for the children. Changes like these have led to a great variety in family life. The moral status of family life is controversial, however. Strong advocates of a family life without obvious patterns and duties oppose defenders of so-called family values. Family is a field where culture wars are fought. It is obviously a theme with a conservative aura. Asking that attention be paid to it is suspect from a progressive perspective unless aims like inclusivity for all forms of family are prominent. It is remarkable, however, that, in these controversies, the question of what family might mean is mostly absent. What family means seems obvious in either of the opposing camps. Those who want to remain outside the controversy are likely to doubt the need for studying what family might mean because it only leads to controversy and also because it seems self-evident. As a result, despite the heated debates on family-related topics, the question of why people experience specific moral appeals among family members is not discussed. It is precisely in this situation of controversy and hot issues, therefore, that it seems important to step back and ask the forgotten question of what family might mean in an open, neutral and basic way. Discussing this question could help shed light on why feelings are running high on precisely the theme of family and on why precisely family-related topics are so prominent among the moral hot issues at present. Moreover, reflection on this question could contribute to overcoming the tendency to be entrenched in positions, the lack of open conversation or debate and deadlocks. What might an ethical reflection that clarifies what is at stake in the current controversial status of family look like? This became the second leading question.

We aim for an ethics that brings the difficult aspects of family to light and explores alternative ways of dealing with them. This is why we chose two fields, givenness and dependence. Here we localised the heart of the controversial status of the theme of family. The moral implications of

family as something given, as a relationship one does not choose but in which one finds oneself, are the subject of contention. Is it right to suggest that relatives are people to depend on, especially for care, guardianship or financial support? Family seems to be reviled and glorified because of a suggested given, inescapable, close relationship of dependence that implies moral duties. This seems to be at odds with ideals of freedom and autonomy, but it is also the basis for moral duties of upbringing and care. More than other relationships, family confronts people in our time with these issues of how to think about givenness and dependence in relation to morality. Apart from this confrontation, family also offers one, so to say, a phenomenon. By reflection on this phenomenon in what may be called a neutral way, outside of or preceding the controversies, it is also possible to discuss the aspects of givenness and dependence embodied in a concrete setting of human life. Givenness and dependence are, in a sense, a matter of fact in families. In this setting, these neutral facts may be investigated as to their moral implications. Therefore, these two fields seemed relevant both to the purpose of exploring the charged, controversial status of the theme of family and of finding different ways to deal with it.

It was clear from the start that such a general reflection on what family might mean must defend itself against the reproach of so-called essentialising. Is it possible to speak about family in general or 'the phenomenon of family'? How can one descry some common denominator in the current multitude of family forms? Does the question of what family might mean not tacitly presuppose a specific family form that is subsequently taken as normative, as a 'structure of life'? In addition, this question can be readily suspected of the tendency to idealise family. Does not the interest in family presuppose that it is a good? How might such an open investigation be critical of all the problematic sides of family life? Can these injustices be accounted for and critically addressed if one starts with the general question of what it might mean to be members of a family? These suspicious questions have accompanied us throughout this book.

This suspicion, together with the central attention to the difficulty of naming what family might mean and for the controversial moral status of the family theme, could easily have made our project negative in nature. However, Gabriel Marcel's notion of family as mystery has provided us with a concept to express this difficulty and with impulses to incorporate it into a constructive approach. We discovered its relevance when analysing current fields of family research. Marcel interprets the character of family as mystery in the sense that one cannot objectify family as a problem apart

from oneself. One is always involved in it. Marcel opposes a mystery approach to a problem approach. Research topics that are demarcated as problems are placed at a distance in order to analyse their factual character and to arrive at objectively convincing insights and solutions. We recognised this problem approach in current family research with its focus on all kinds of problematic aspects of family life, with the aim of solving them. The basic question of whether and in what sense family is a distinct sphere of morality is not prominent in these approaches. It seems to be presupposed but not addressed as such. Therefore, we found little points of connection in these studies. The alternative indicated in Marcel's mystery approach starts not with a clear, insightful demarcation like the problem approaches, but with 'evoking' the mystery first of all. The 'soul should be awakened to its presence' (*Homo Viator*, 66). For Marcel, this mode of 'evocation' is particularly necessary because, according to him, his time lacks sensitivity to mystery. A basic attitude towards life, having to do with an awareness of what one receives in life, with being thankful and with answering this given by creatively shaping it oneself, is missing. It is an attitude of respect and piety. If family is approached with this attitude, it may be possible 'to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life' (82). For Marcel, approaching family as mystery thus implies a 'sense of holiness', a feeling for the sacred.

Evoking the mystery means not presenting the theme as a generally comprehensible content, but in such a way that it appeals to readers, appeals to 'inner resources'. For this purpose, we turned first of all to expressions of family in literary and artistic works. We selected expressions in which family ties come to light in such a way that the reader or viewer also becomes aware of the feeling for the sacred needed to descry it. We found them in Antigone's references to the divine character of the duty to bury her brother, in Rembrandt's Holy Family paintings and in the lived 'adulterous family' of the book of Hosea as an image of the relationship between God and believers. By starting from these literary and artistic expressions, we could avoid letting our reflection be dominated from the start by the controversial character of the theme of family which has unavoidably seeped into the recent academic discussions. Moreover, as Marcel indicates, these literary modes of expressions are better suited to evoking mystery than conceptual reflections. They leave more room for ambiguities and allow for the reader's involvement in the theme. They evoke a transcendent dimension in ways that do not need a strong, confessional religious language and can therefore be related to a broad reflection on what family might mean.

In these literary and artistic works, family ties come to light as mostly unarticulated bonds that are experienced as given and as a basis for acting and expecting something from other members of the family. Family members interpret this tie differently, however, which gives rise to conflict. The ways in which the ties come to light differ as well – from the extreme case of Antigone's being prepared to die for the illegal burial of her brother to a common everyday family scene like that in Rembrandt's Kassel painting or the restoration of Hosea's adulterous family. These evocations of family ties gave rise to reflective questions on how it is possible to formulate what a family tie might mean and how obvious it is, given the conflicts on it between Antigone and her family or the presence of a curtain and frame in Rembrandt's painting. The latter reveals that it is not family as such, but family as an image, that brings a family tie to light and enables reflection on what it might mean morally. The book of Hosea with its lived image of an 'adulterous family' enabled a further exploration of this image character. Here the tensions related to the concrete, everyday dependence of family members become an image that reveals a broader, even fundamental dependence of all life rooted in God.

Only secondarily did we turn to recent academic debates and other ethical reflections in which family figures. How could a mystery approach be elaborated in relation to these discourses? Our guiding focus has been that of the impasse. We analysed reflections on family with an eye to moments when they get stuck. Here, we supposed, we could investigate the fundamental difficulty of naming what family might mean. To do so, we selected various reflections with both critical and constructive aims and from different times. The recent critical voices we analysed are opposed to the idea as such that family can be studied as a distinct sphere of life because it suggests a sphere that is not political – that is, not shaped by human social arrangements – but a given. This suggestion makes the category 'family' liable to becoming a vehicle of dominant family views. Thus, reflection on family as a distinct sphere contributes to the exclusion and marginalisation not only of alternative forms of family life, but also of the care for dependants that takes place in families. We followed these critical arguments to the point where they reach an impasse. This impasse is often the result of a more constructive element that is not aligned to their critique. Thus, the critical voices of Judith Butler, kinship anthropology and the dependency critique also emphasise the need to reconsider the interdependence of human beings and of environment at large. As a result, they are also critical of the reigning views of being human and of knowing and acting in particular into which this fundamental relatedness is not

incorporated. That family is an obvious context in which this interdependence comes to light is acknowledged. This does not, however, alter their basic focus on the problematic aspects of family, both as a category in reflection and as a phenomenon in real life. This leads to impasses. These proved relevant to our reflection in the mode of mystery because they reveal the need for a different kind of approach able to account for the interdependence that is experienced pre-eminently in the sphere of family, as well as for the risks mentioned. We explored how a mystery approach could live up to this demand.

The constructive approaches showed the need for a mystery approach in a different way. We analysed authors who do reflect on family as a distinct sphere of life that is also important to take into account as regards morality. Here indeed it turned out to be a very complex task to formulate this distinct moral meaning of family and to avoid the impression that family is this special community automatically, in itself. We thus encountered the complexities of Hegel's characterisation of family as embodying the tensive combination of the natural, immediate and unconscious basis of acting. Ciavatta's interpretation of Hegel deepened this complexity by adding the paradox of family as a setting in which one becomes a person by being part of a 'we' – that is, by moments in which one is deprived of one's self-awareness and conscious decision-making. This intricate interwovenness of the individual and the collective in a 'we' is also highlighted in Schleiermacher's understanding of family as the germ of all community. In a similar way, Jean Lacroix's view of family focusses on the desire to be completed by and united with the other as a prerequisite for becoming a person. In these very general and fundamental ethical reflections, at the level of understanding what it means to be a moral human being, we observed the authors struggling to find a way to express the complex, paradoxical moral aspects of family. We analysed these difficulties as also pointing to the mystery character of family and to a different mode of understanding that could account for it. In the recent ethical views of Brenda Almond and Don Browning, we observed how room for the complexity and mystery of family disappears as a result of a strong, one-sided focus on its natural character. This focus does not stimulate moral reflection on what family might mean – an observation that again adds to the need for an alternative kind of approach.

In our analyses of these conceptual reflections, we needed to follow the arguments of the authors very closely in order to let the reader experience the complexities or incongruities as real impasses that ask for a different kind of reflection. Subsequently, we took them as impulses to elaborate

a mystery approach in line with Marcel's thinking in three movements. Before turning to our specifying perspectives of givenness and dependence, we focussed on the primary issue of whether and how family can be approached as a distinct moral sphere, a special kind of being connected, which we indicated by the phrase 'family tie'. A mystery approach pays attention to the experience of this tie presenting itself as a basis for expecting something from family members, and for acting in a specific way. It also points to the intuitive character of this presence; it does not figure so much as a conscious, explicitly mentioned reference point. Nevertheless, the tie may be experienced as a strong impulse for action, as implying certain responsibilities and duties – even though family members differ as to how they act on the basis of this tie. These aspects of the non-disclosed character of the tie and the differing experiences of what it implies turned out to be constructive elements for the further exploration of family as a distinct moral sphere.

Awareness of the character of mystery draws attention to the unnameable nature of the tie and what it implies as well as to the strong experiences of it as something one finds present without having chosen it. The latter aspect already points to the experience of givenness. Attention to the mystery character made us focus on the active attitude that is presupposed in the experience of givenness. This is one of taking reality utterly seriously in order to descry a deeper meaning in it which cannot be objectified. Living in a family may give rise to this attitude because in this setting one experiences pre-eminently what may be called a structure of life. As such, family appeals to people and asks for a response. The aspect of dependence was taken as a starting point to specify what this response might mean. Dependence as lived in a family refers to experiences of being intimately included in each other's lives, not on the basis of choice, and not to a certain degree, but fundamentally, forming one's personal identity. One cannot imagine oneself apart from one's family – however strained these relations may be. The character of mystery points out that this dependence remains obscure and cannot be elaborated in an outline of how to act on the basis of family ties. It also makes one aware of the reticent, closed character of family as a prerequisite for the existence of this special kind of dependence.

This threefold elaboration of the mystery character of family was interwoven with the analysis of the current controversial status of the theme of family. The current difficulties with the theme of family may be understood as related to precisely this character of mystery. This understanding deepens our first introduction to family as confronting us in our time with

givenness and dependence. Family is not just a difficult phenomenon due to the friction with dominant perspectives on relationships like choice, equality and substitutability. Behind this friction is a deeper sense of being at a loss on all three levels of the mystery we investigated. People are at a loss to know how to make sense of a tie which is experienced but cannot be fixed. What is the status of this experience? How should one act on the basis of this tie? Second, this experience can be understood as an appeal or call to find a deeper meaning in life, to approach life as given. This meaning cannot be objectified, however. How then should one respond to this appeal? The appeal may be harmful or beneficial. Many responses can be imagined, and there is no general rule for deciding on their correctness. Neither, finally, does the understanding of this given tie as dependent on others imply a clear view of one's obligations to them. All three aspects of family as mystery thus reveal it as a reality in which people are involved, which appeals to them and to which they have to respond. We cannot, however, objectify the meaning of this reality, define the moral status of the appeal and outline the good response. Thus, family is an awkward theme precisely because of its mystery character.

That our time is at a loss with this mystery character became clearly visible in the ambiguity of the critical views on family that we analysed. Among the critical feminist voices, for example, we discovered a fascination with Hegel's view of family despite the fierce objections to its essentialising character. Family continues to intrigue these researchers despite their fundamental criticism of family as a meaningful category. In a different way, this is shown in the vehement and ongoing opposition to biologistic views among some kinship anthropologists. They cannot regard the views of family as given by nature as definitively disqualified. Kinship remains an intriguing phenomenon for an anthropology that views itself as being 'after kinship'. This ambiguity and the troublesome status of family revealed in the impasses can be explained by a lack of sensitivity to its character as mystery on each of the three levels we investigated. Thus, paying attention to the mystery character has also turned out to be of help in clarifying the current controversial status of the topic of family itself.

The Sacred Character of Family as Mystery

Our ethical investigation into what family might mean is a theological one that asks what lights up when a transcendent dimension is brought into play. In our view, family is a good topic through which to explore this because its connotations of givenness and dependence touch upon a transcendent or

sacred dimension. In Marcel's approach to family as mystery, which regards it as intrinsically related to the sacred, we recognised a similar interest. His view of mystery provided us with a starting point for our investigation, but no more than that. Marcel did not elaborate on his approach in a more general ethical framework, nor did he feel the need to account for why an approach to family as mystery would enable one 'to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life' (*Homo Viator*, 82). At the end of our study, we would like to look back on how we elaborated on Marcel's notion. We will look back on the theological ethical character of our approach and relate it more emphatically to our time, which differs from that of Marcel's time precisely on this point of a feeling for the sacred. Our time is already different because the framework of a 'waning feeling for the sacred' to which Marcel could refer rather unproblematically has been complicated by the so-called postsecular critique.[1] The recognition of our time as postsecular does not mean, however, that the secular suspicion of a transcendent perspective in ethics is no longer present. In our reading of present-day authors as different as Butler and Almond, we observed how natural it is to associate attention to a sacred dimension with absolutising tendencies, entering arenas of contention and limiting one's audience to circles of believers. Drawing attention to a transcendent dimension in relation to family is, moreover, seen as only reinforcing the dangers of talking about family in a way that excludes marginalised family forms and sanctions the status quo. Therefore, it is important to return to this aspect of our investigation and relate it to a contemporary author who situates himself consciously in this postsecular debate and whose thinking also resonates with aspects of Marcel's view on the difficulties of making sense of the sacred.

In his article 'Recovering the Sacred', Charles Taylor analyses our time as characterised by a 'pervasive' call for some form of re-enchantment of the world which has 'arisen in the face of modernity' (115).[2] This call is rooted in the awareness that something has been lost in the modern process of disenchantment that should be recovered. The critical question it gives rise to is whether this taking leave of disenchantment has a deep enough awareness of what this disenchantment is about – which is necessary to provide a convincing alternative. According to Taylor, 'enchantment' means

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[1] For a discussion of theological views of the postsecular, see the special issue Petruschka Schaafsma, 'Making Sense of the Postsecular: Theological Explorations of a Critical Concept' and 'Evil and Religion: Ricoeurian Reflections on Postsecular Reassessments of Religion', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76/2 (2015): 91–9 and 129–48).

[2] Charles Taylor, 'Recovering the Sacred', *Inquiry* 54/2 (2011): 113–25.

experiencing the natural world as inhabited by spirits and moral forces by which human life is affected in ways humans cannot understand or control. This popular view is paralleled on a metaphysical level in a theory of the world as reflecting and manifesting a 'Great Chain of Being' (114). In this view, the natural order of the world is the same as the social one. 'Disenchantment' means taking leave of the idea that natural things are 'charged' – that is, have an 'incorporated meaning' (115). Meanings are nothing more than something in the human mind – projections – and are thus arbitrary. As a result, the 'physical world, outside the mind, must proceed by causal laws that in no way turn on the moral meanings things have for us'. 'Re-enchantment' protests the implication of this unmasking – that is, the idea of a universe 'totally devoid of meaning' (116).

Taylor criticises both dis- and re-enchantment because of their indebtedness to the idea that meaning is arbitrarily conferred. In his view, this need not follow from a critique of the enchanted view of the world. When meaning no longer resides in the physical nature of things as such, this does not do away with the experience of certain demands on us that we cannot regard as projective and thus arbitrary. We experience these demands as 'claims made on us by certain times, places, actions and people' (118). These are morally relevant because we cannot simply ignore them; they count as 'strong evaluations' (117). Our response to them is such that they 'genuinely motivate us'. This genuine character must also be understood in a normative sense: our moral sensitivity depends on the ability to be motivated in this way. People who do not experience such claims are thought to have a 'limitation, blindness, or insensitivity'. There is thus something 'objectively right about this response' which should be cultivated. The special character of these strong evaluations consists, on the one hand, in their being 'firmly anchored in our being-in-the world' but experienced as 'sacred' on the other. They are not 'sacred' in the sense of enchanted – that is, as a qualification of specific locations, times, performances, or persons (118). Rather, their sacredness lies in their inescapable claim on us which we cannot regard as a demand that 'just emanates from us' (117). This meaning of the notion of the sacred does not need re-enchantment to become aware of it; it only requires an acknowledgement of the non-arbitrary and genuinely motivating character of some claims on us.

Taylor's attention to the sacred character of certain claims on us may be read as a parallel to Marcel's attention to mystery. Both presuppose a specific attitude towards reality. Marcel uses terms like 'gratitude', 'respect' and 'piety' to characterise it. For him, this attitude presupposes

a feeling for the sacred because it does not relate to the world as either a deterministic universe or as a matter to be shaped by human will. It is an attitude which is open to the world and responds to the appeal of life. It takes responsibility by engaging in life. This appeal clearly parallels Taylor's notion of a claim, a non-projective meaning that is found in the world and has a sacred status in the sense that people experience it as something that cannot be ignored but on whose basis they should act. Taylor sees our time as one in which this sacred status is not acknowledged. The disenchanted views of reality are inclined to regard such claims as nothing but human projections and therefore arbitrary. The calls for re-enchantment, on the other hand, are unable to provide an alternative because they stick to the disenchanted analysis of sacredness as presupposing a world inhabited by uncontrollable spirits and moral forces. This analysis of our time does not just regard it as one of disenchantment. It also recognises a dissatisfaction with the modern project. However, this dissatisfaction is trapped in the terms in which modernity has grasped the problem of the sacred. What is lacking is a feeling for the sacred in the world as making strong claims on us.

It is easy to observe parallels to these dis- and re-enchanting approaches in current reflections on family. Here, disenchantment is prominent in the critical views that oppose any overstatement of the given character of family as somehow 'sacred' and therefore good. In part, they observe the dangers of absolutising the contingent already in the project as such of investigating family as a distinct moral sphere. Calls for re-enchantment, on the other hand, can be associated with the views of Almond and Browning, who aim for a renewal of a kind of spiritual naturalism. They draw attention to the lost awareness of what is natural, which they see as indispensable for revealing the good. In our analyses of both the critical and constructive views, we concluded that the impasses to which these views lead are rooted in a lack of awareness of family as mystery. Following Taylor, we can further specify this lack as one of a transcendent dimension: implicit in it is a view of the sacred as either arbitrary projection or inherent in the natural world. On the other hand, we also concluded that the impasses arise because a sense of mystery is not entirely absent. The critical, disenchanted feminist views and those of the new kinship anthropology display a fascination with family despite their strong opposition to family as a kind of given. In a similar way, the dependency critique – despite its aim to turn hidden family care into a public task – is not unaware of how dependence comes to light precisely in this context of family. The re-enchanted references to the natural in Almond and Browning also hint at

family as something mysterious that cannot be completely accounted for in terms of how the sciences understand what is natural. However, these aspects in which traces of an awareness of the mystery character come to light could not be elaborated within the frameworks of these critical and constructive views because of what we might call their overly minimalist or maximalist views of the sacred. The critical views are too afraid of transcendence because of the danger of a glorification of the arbitrary; the constructive ones are too fully committed to the natural as guiding morality and thus having a transcendent status to allow for an elaboration of family as mystery.

Family as Mystery: Appeal and Answer

Taylor's analysis is helpful in gaining a better understanding of how transcendence is at stake in our time also in reflections on family that do not explicitly refer to it. We recognise his aim of formulating a different notion of the sacred beyond dis- and re-enchantment in our theological ethical elaboration of Marcel's approach to family as mystery. Taylor's notion of a 'sacred claim' also challenges us to take a closer look at an important aspect of our elaboration of the moral character of family as mystery itself, which we did not yet analyse separately. Taylor relates this sacred character to the experience of an inescapable moral claim on us that cannot be regarded as a projection. He focusses on the experience of being claimed as crucial for morality. The claim is not formulated as a kind of general rule. The notion of a 'sacred claim' clearly resonates with what we have so far indicated by terms like the 'appeal', 'call' or 'duty' inherent in the family tie.

We came across this appeal in the Prologue. It is prominent in the question of the guardianship of Ruth and Lucille that different family members in turn accept as a matter of course. The story of Antigone also starts from her experience of an appeal implied in the relationship to her brother. For her, the call to bury her brother is inescapable. That she claims it to be a divine law corresponds to Taylor's notion of a sacred claim. The story also reveals that the other family members do not act on the family tie, at least not initially. That they cannot ignore it in the end seems to indicate that they did experience the call right from the start. In relation to the perspective of givenness as well, we reflected on the sacred appeal of family. We first saw this evoked by Rembrandt's image of the Holy Family, where a perfectly ordinary scene can serve as an image of the sacred. This scene, surrounded by frame and curtain, was finally interpreted as a strong

image that can communicate a sacred appeal. It invites the viewer to regard everyday family life as given in the sense of having a deeper meaning. This alternative understanding of givenness does not imply that family as such is sacred or a good. Being open to the experience of family as given means adopting an active attitude of taking life as one finds it utterly seriously so that one can experience the appeal and a deeper meaning can come to light. This active attitude can then continue in formulating an answer to the appeal. The answer need not be affirmative. Nor can it be formulated in general: one has to find one's own way creatively to deal with the experience of the appeal. As such, the experience of the appeal is closely related to the understanding of family as a context in which people experience dependence. Dependency relations are about being claimed and claiming. We discovered this to be a prerequisite of moral formation and thus of becoming a person. Family is a context in which the claims inherent in the dependency relation are felt most urgently. By approaching this dependence as mystery, it is possible to acknowledge the strength of the appeal of the family tie without immediately evaluating it in a moral sense. Rather, it makes one aware of how hard it is to evaluate this appeal.

Does this elaboration of family as mystery in terms of making sacred claims on us not once more provoke all the critical objections of essentialising and idealising? People may not experience the appeals in the context of family relationships as contingent, but, when they reflect on them from a distance, they can easily see they are the results of a specific historical constellation. Does Taylor's concept of strong evaluations not open the door again to absolutising the status quo, including particular situations of abuse by accepting claims people cannot bear? The discourse of the sacred in the sense in which we find it in Taylor indicates that certain claims on us cannot be explained as constructed and that these are crucial to understanding morality. This argument does not imply, however, that these claims *are* sacred in the sense that they should be followed or accepted and cannot be rejected. Family is a setting where people experience these claims, but that does not mean this setting is itself sacred or good. Nor is it fixed in its form.

As we emphasised from the start, family is there where people experience it, also outside of blood relations. When family is related to experiences of givenness and dependence, this can be further explained as being called or inescapably experiencing a claim on oneself. Calling this experience sacred is an attempt to further specify the mystery character. That means that this discourse of the sacred claim can be understood as one that tries to express an aspect of life in which one is always personally involved and that

therefore cannot be translated into objective, non-personal language. Such a claim cannot be formulated in a general sense outside of the situation in which one experiences it, nor can it be related to certain fixed forms of family life. This comes to light also in *Antigone*, where the claim is never formulated explicitly. The law to which Antigone appeals is divine in the sense that no one knows its origin; it is an unwritten law. Antigone experiences its claim immediately. It 'genuinely motivates' her, and she regards her response to this law as 'objectively right', to use Taylor's words. However, Ismene and Creon, who are also family members of Polynices, respond in very different ways. Apparently, Antigone cannot convince them of the correctness of her acting on the claim of the family tie, not even by appealing to an unwritten, divine law. Moreover, the cost of Antigone's way of answering the claim of the family tie is high.

This reference to Antigone points to the reverse of the criticism that the notion of a sacred claim implies a dangerous absolutising of the contingent. An awareness of the experience of moral claims as sacred seems crucial precisely to prevent the dangers of abuse in the context of family. The sacred character of the claim implies an appeal that is so strong that one may give in to it automatically, without reflection. Ciavatta expresses a similar awareness in understanding family as the sphere of unreflective morality, evoked so intensely in Antigone's actions. Moral action in the sphere of family is characterised by immediacy. This unconscious level of our moral experience is thus incommunicable. The significance or authority that family members may have for each other cannot be understood by outsiders. Within a family, one experiences it intuitively. The acknowledgement of these moral experiences is crucial in being able to discern the specific risks of family life. The immediate impulses for acting on the basis of the family tie may be so strong that the individual family members deny themselves right up to possibly harming themselves. Lacroix in particular makes us aware of the characteristic reticence of family, its non-disclosing character which requires the secluded sphere of the private. In this secluded sphere, the sacred character of the claim might even be more dangerous because there are less competing claims. Such dangers come to light precisely by acknowledging the sacred character of the claims experienced in a family setting.

Lacroix is aware of these dangers of the closed and intimate character of family. He analyses the concrete practice of confession as expressing the heart of family life, the delicate moral substance of being open to the sacred claim and answering it. He also understands it in terms of sacrifice. This term clearly indicates that the dangers of the sacred claim are not absent. In

a family, people may open to the other in such a way that they surrender themselves to it. Lacroix, however, regards the reticent context of family as one in which it may be possible to arrive at a way of confessing and thus of sacrifice that does not destroy people but recognises them and makes them persons. Here, intimacy and sociability create a sphere in which confession can be reciprocal. That is not possible in the public sphere. The public confession of a criminal is not answered by society. It is precisely by confessing that the criminal is revealed as guilty. The public domain is ruled by the logic of crime and punishment. There is no real deliverance from guilt in this logic. In the context of family, confession may become reciprocal by being answered by the other. Lacroix emphasises that this reciprocity arises by relating to a third, higher dimension. Confession is not just expressing one's love for or guilt to the other, but seeing oneself as part of a unity that transcends the two. Lacroix uses both the notions of family and the sacred for this higher dimension. For Lacroix, the possibility of having a child may serve as a concrete implication of this commitment to a higher 'we'. Taylor's notion of the sacred claim highlights that this moment of confession is not something to which people decide independently, out of themselves. It is to be understood as answering a higher appeal.

   In the story of Antigone, this higher appeal is expressed in the divine character of the law she follows. It is in the setting of family that this divine law, this sacred claim, comes to light. The play could easily have been staged in the public domain, but then it would have become a play on whether one can pay final honour to a traitor. By localising the issue in the family, the observer becomes aware of the moral impact of a *sacred* claim the origin of which no one knows. In a similar way, the viewer of Rembrandt's *Holy Family with Painted Frame and Curtain* may become aware of this claim. The painting invites one to descry a deeper meaning in this seemingly ordinary scene. This meaning has to do with the fact that these people belong together in an intimate way in which both love and guilt may be shared. What is an invitation in Rembrandt becomes a sharp admonition in Hosea. The adulterous family reminds the reader that being deaf to the higher appeal means losing solidarity among the people. If the believers do not acknowledge their dependence on God, they become defenders of their alleged right to live, to the basic necessities for life in opposition to each other. They are no longer in a relation with God in which love and guilt are confessed. When the sacred claim is acknowledged, however, a restoration of the family tie that enables this confession is possible.

When we indicate the moral character of the family setting in these general terms as one of experiencing and answering a sacred claim, we should not forget its nature of mystery. Otherwise, the two well-known risks loom large. The one is to regard family as such as a moral good; the other is to be fundamentally suspicious of all moral impulses that appear in the setting of family. It is in taking these risks seriously that we concluded that ethical reflection that approaches family as mystery sees it as a 'strong image'. Family is not a moral good or morally suspect in itself. Family is a 'strong image' in that it makes one aware of the mystery and invites creative interpretations of it. This way of imagining family means being confronted with the given and dependent character of life. By asking what family might mean, our study aims to show how family itself, taken as an image that evokes certain aspects of life, can be studied to find ways to live with this givenness and dependence. As such, it proposes a way out of the polarisations and deadlocks that dominate current ethical reflections on family. By focussing attention on family as mystery, we aim to foster an openness to experiences of givenness and dependence, including their sacred dimension, which is crucial to understanding morality.

It is in everyday family life that people gain these experiences of givenness and dependence. Here, they live with family as mystery. This everyday life may be common or exceptional, but it is never perfect. It is a life like Ruth's and Lucille's, who lose their mother at young age. Nevertheless, the deceased mother is intensely present in Ruth's experience of the world, her understanding of herself and her relation to her guardian, Sylvie. The same obtains for the continuing presence of her sister Lucille after she has deliberately left the family home to live elsewhere. Is Ruth's way of living her dependence on her family members the right one, however? It is clear that Ruth does not serve as a moral model of the correct ways of answering the sacred claims. The reader might identify with her way of answering the claims just as well as with her sister's opposite way. The two options of staying or leaving, of Ruth and Lucille, are alive. Thus, people find their way in dealing with family as mystery. Ethics is not first of all about deciding which way is morally right. This approach is dominant in many an ethical reflection on family-related hot issues. In family issues, this dominance leads to deadlocks between a focus on keeping families intact and a warning against the hindering effect of family. Attention to the everyday character of morality creates a way out of these polarisations. Our approach has aimed to descry the mystery in everyday moral life. This implies taking life seriously in its everyday or even trivial character in order to descry the moral appeal inherent in it as well as distancing oneself from it by discovering its inscrutable nature and unconscious impact.

This means that ethics contributes to becoming aware of the mystery in everyday life in a way that does not aim to control it.

Housekeeping looks at family from Ruth's perspective. By identifying with her, the reader is invited to ponder the final reciprocal confession by Ruth and Sylvie, which leads them on a path that seems to be anything but morally preferable – becoming transients. It is hard to imagine family welfare workers who would support this option, but, imagining family from the perspective of Ruth as a reader of *Housekeeping*, one may agree with Robinson's remark that 'the saddest family, properly understood, is a miracle of solace'.[3] It is to such an understanding of this broken, homeless family as a 'miracle of solace' that the mystery approach of this book is intended to contribute.

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[3] Marilynne Robinson, 'Family', in *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (New York: Picador, 1998), 87–107, at 90.

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