

*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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> Hosea's starting a family with an unfaithful woman should serve as an image for Israel's unfaithfulness to God.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to what one would expect, the

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> The NIV translation does not show that in Hosea 1:2 the Hebrew root for adultery, *znh / זנ*, is used in reference not just to the woman, but also to the children. *znh / זנ* 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,

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).<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> The chapter opens by relating Israel's childhood and God's love for the child to Israel's being called out of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>9</sup>

The language of fornication or adultery is absent, but the relationship is anything but unproblematic. Israel does not respond to God's love.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son' (11:1). The root for 'love' (*ʕbb* / 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"'.

<sup>8</sup> 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.'

<sup>9</sup> 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'.

<sup>10</sup> Israel's behaviour is summarised as: 'the more they were called, the more they went away from me' (11:2).

<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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).<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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).<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>12</sup> 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).

<sup>13</sup> The text speaks of a 'return to Egypt' and of Assyria ruling over Israel 'because they refuse to repent' (11:5).

<sup>14</sup> This punishment is mentioned only briefly, in terms of a flashing sword that will devour false prophets and their plans (11:6).

<sup>15</sup> 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).

<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup> 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).<sup>18</sup> 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).<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>17</sup> The 'leading into the wilderness' seems in line with the punishment (cf. also 12:10). Keita points out, however, that the Hebrew word *midbar* / מִדְבָּר, 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.

<sup>18</sup> Other passages in which Israel is depicted as (bearing) fruit are Hosea 9:10, 16; 10:1, 12–13; 14:6–9.

<sup>19</sup> 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<sup>20</sup> 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).<sup>21</sup> 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 intertwining of the two kinds of imagery is also expressed in a central term used to characterise both Israel’s unfaithfulness and the way

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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' / יד*, 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).<sup>22</sup> 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' / יד* 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).<sup>23</sup> In sum, *jd' / יד* 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

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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 intertwining 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-imagining 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*.<sup>24</sup>

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

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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'.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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).'

<sup>26</sup> Kelle, 'Hosea 1-3', 205.

<sup>27</sup> Keefe (*Woman's Body*, 62-4, 148-50) refers to Helgard Balz-Cochois, Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes and T. Drorah Setel. See also Kelle, 'Hosea 1-3', 200; Kelle, 'Hosea 4-14', 344.

<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 *ʿrāphim* (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.<sup>30</sup> These

<sup>29</sup> 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).

<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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

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.

<sup>31</sup> 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 reevaluation 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.<sup>32</sup> '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

<sup>32</sup> 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'.<sup>33</sup> 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

<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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

<sup>34</sup> 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).<sup>35</sup> 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’ describe 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

<sup>35</sup> 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).<sup>36</sup> 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

<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> Political and economic theorising and theories on justice especially presuppose the very same ideal of the independent, self-sufficient, autonomous individual.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> This does not mean that Rawls is blind to

<sup>37</sup> 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 legitimisation of the privatisation of family. We analyse her study more closely later.

<sup>38</sup> Sullivan-Dunbar calls this an Enlightenment development (*Human Dependency*, 27–8).

<sup>39</sup> 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).

<sup>40</sup> 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, Sessa, 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.<sup>41</sup>

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

<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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

<sup>42</sup> 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).

<sup>43</sup> 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 (*miser cordia*) (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.<sup>44</sup> 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

<sup>44</sup> 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.'<sup>45</sup> 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 be 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

<sup>45</sup> 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’.<sup>46</sup> 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

<sup>46</sup> 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).<sup>47</sup> 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'.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> It is precisely the

<sup>47</sup> 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.

<sup>48</sup> 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).

<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> Does such an understanding of dependence

<sup>50</sup> 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

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.<sup>51</sup> 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

<sup>51</sup> 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'.<sup>52</sup> Interpreters do not agree, however, on whether Schleiermacher is a wholehearted supporter of this new family and its corresponding gender roles.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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

<sup>52</sup> DeVries, 'Be Converted', 334.

<sup>53</sup> DeVries, 'Be Converted', 333n6; Heleen Zorgdrager, *Theologie die verschil maakt: Taal en sekse-differentie als sleutels tot Schleiermachers denken* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003), 118–22.

<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> Reflections on dependence are scattered throughout Schleiermacher's work, and the terminology he uses for it is not uniform.<sup>56</sup> 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' (*Gespalteneheit*)<sup>57</sup> 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'.<sup>58</sup> Dependence in this context of marriage and family should not be played off against the absolute dependence of the religious feeling.<sup>59</sup> Love always includes both: love for human beings and for the divine being.

<sup>55</sup> Laist, *Problem der Abhängigkeit*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> 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).

<sup>57</sup> '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.

<sup>58</sup> 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. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), §61. We will refer to paragraph numbers, which are similar for the English translation and the German original.

<sup>59</sup> 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).<sup>60</sup> 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

<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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

<sup>61</sup> 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.

<sup>62</sup> 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.'<sup>63</sup>

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.<sup>64</sup> 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

<sup>63</sup> English translation cited in DeVries, 'Be Converted', 342n33; German original: 'Im ersten Bewußtsein des Kindes von seinem Verhältnis 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 1/13 (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.

<sup>64</sup> 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 (*Gespalttheit*). 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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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

<sup>65</sup> 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).

<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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).<sup>68</sup> 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

<sup>67</sup> 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).

<sup>68</sup> '[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.<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>69</sup> '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 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'.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> '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'.<sup>71</sup> 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.

<sup>71</sup> 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.