

“I am scared too”: Literature, Ethics without Moral Concepts and the Fear of Schooling in *Garmann’s Summer*

VIKTOR JOHANSSON

Stockholm University, Sweden

In advancing an ethical position, speaking about persons, either myself or others, as morally relevant, we seem to need the context of a narrative, a story, in which moral and existential concepts have a role (Eldridge, 1989 p. 12). Moreover, if we can think morally by telling and retelling stories, through literary criticism and poetic prose, we are not even dependent on moral predicates to make a moral point (Burbules & Smeyers, 2008). Wittgenstein *shows* us that our philosophical views are intertwined with our lives, that philosophical views are existential and, accordingly that resolving any philosophical problem is an ethical affair. Cora Diamond emphasizes this:

The presence of moral thought [...] may be reflected in language, not in the use of moral predicates, tied to our interests in moral properties, but in some of the ways we use language about all sorts of not specifically moral things, like death in war, for example, or pulling horses out of deep snow. The idea that moral discourse is tied to moral predicates shows, I think, a false conception of what it is for our thought to be *about* something moral. Being about good and evil is a matter of use not subject matter (Diamond, 1996, p. 245).

We may use narratives to make different moral points. In telling a story we may, even without using such concepts, give life to concepts such of bravery, fidelity, honesty, justice, and so on. Stories give life to moral positions. There are even occasions when our moral concepts cannot make our lives intelligible to ourselves or others. This is not to say that one particular view of moral thinking is right or wrong, but simply reaffirms how difficult it is to get an overview of our actual use of concepts we may call moral since it is tempting to say that these constitute moral thinking. This is precisely the struggle against dogmatism that philosophers such as Wittgenstein call to our attention to – a struggle against our tendency to search for one form of justification for our practices, whether in mathematics or in ethics. Oskari Kuusela writes, “The struggle against dogmatism,” of metaphysics and philosophical theses laying down requirements for how our lives, language, and thinking must work “is a struggle with oneself and one’s prejudices (wherever they might be inherited from).” Kuusela continues, “[Wittgenstein’s] philosophy turns from the imposition of metaphysical demands onto reality to the acknowledgement of the ethical demands that philosophy places on its practitioners” (2008 p. 285, 286; Wittgenstein, 1980 p. 16). Philosophy should change our selves.

If moral philosophy or ethical thinking in education is constrained by the philosophical tendency to take moral concepts as the only means to articulate a moral position or make a moral judgment, then philosophy has laid down a dogmatic requirement for what moral rationality may consist of. Philosophers risk to have a limited view on moral rationality, whether their philosophy investigates broad moral concepts such as “duty,” “right,” “wrong,” “good,” “bad,” “desirable,” or, as in virtue ethics, concepts of virtues and vices such as “courage,” “meanness,” “kindness,” “temperance,” “pride,” and so on. Of course, these concepts and the lines of reasoning connected to them are not necessarily misguided, but we need to be careful about our tendency to let these be our only way to think about morality. We should be careful about our inclination to take these concepts as metaphysical requirements that universally determine what moral thinking consists of.

This essay investigates aspects of morality without moral concepts and explores ways to avoid dogmatism in ethics. I claim that moral reasoning involves a form of perfectionism that continually reconsiders what moral reasoning may be by introducing further movements of ethical thought that transforms our pictures of what moral reason is. I shall *show* this by drawing especially on Wittgenstein but also Kant, in particular the extensions of their philosophy found in the work of Diamond, Eldridge, Crary and Cavell, and by

reading the Norwegian picture book *Garmann's Summer*. My attempt will be to give voice to this idea, not merely by argument, but by *showing* a moral form of reasoning beyond what we may think of as moral concepts.¹

I

How can Wittgenstein's philosophy, which appears to say very little about ethics, have a moral point? In the *Investigations*, ethics is explicitly mentioned only once very briefly at § 77. Although the point of invoking the notion of ethics in that paragraph is not primarily ethical, this paragraph is useful to explore a morality without moral concepts.

... [I]t is clear that the degree to which the sharp picture can resemble the blurred one depends on the degree to which the latter lacks sharpness. For imagine having to draw a sharp picture 'corresponding' to a blurred one. In the latter there is a blurred red rectangle; you replace it with a sharp one. Of course – several such sharply delineated rectangles could be drawn to correspond to the blurred one. – But if the colours in the original shade into one another without a hint of any boundary, won't it become a hopeless task to draw a sharp picture corresponding to the blurred one? Won't you then have to say: "Here I might just as well draw a circle as a rectangle or a heart, for all the colour merge. Anything – and nothing – is right." — And this is the position in which, for example, someone finds himself in ethics or aesthetics when he looks for definitions that correspond to our concepts.

In this sort of predicament, always ask yourself: How did we *learn* the meaning of this word ("good", for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings (Wittgenstein, 1953 § 77).

Wittgenstein is unmistakably arguing against dogmatic ways of philosophizing. There is no clear and exact way to go about making this blurry rectangle. All rectangles made out of the blurry one are useful in that they say something about the original picture, but none of them fully captures what the blurred rectangle depicts. This is of course an allegory that sheds light on the problem of drawing sharp boundaries for concepts. If language is constantly developing as Wittgenstein suggests and if, following Cavell's take on Wittgenstein, concepts always are projectable in further contexts, then such sharp boundaries, though they may serve some purposes and surely give some indication of how we use certain concepts in some contexts, then our current linguistic practices cannot fully cover all possible uses of our concepts and our concepts can be depicted as having blurred boundaries (Cavell, 1979 p. 180-190; Wittgenstein, 1953 § 18, 71, 76). We can see how Wittgenstein tries to release us from a far too limiting picture of language as dependent upon on strict definitions or distinct concepts. Still, we want to know, recalling that Wittgenstein's philosophy makes ethical demands on the philosopher, how such release is an ethical matter.

We find such dogmatism in many forms in moral philosophy. Take Kant's categorical imperative as an example. Kant writes that his groundwork is "the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*" (Kant, 1997 4:392). Kant claims not to be teaching anything new about morality, but takes upon himself to show that "common human reason" already knows how to reason morally (1997, 4:404-405). In this, Kant's approach to ethics resembles Wittgenstein's investigations of language. What may be misleading is taking whatever that investigation utilizes to elucidate aspects of our moral discourses as *the* supreme principle of morality, as *the* order of moral thought, as Wittgenstein put it (1953, § 132).

We can take principles of morality as what Wittgenstein describes as *objects of comparison*, which are illustrations – Wittgenstein uses his language games that way – that are meant to shed light on how we talk and think in moral discourse, by way, as he puts it, "not only of similarities, but also dissimilarities" (Wittgenstein, 1953 § 130). Thus, the idea of searching for principles of morality, whether as a categorical imperative or a utilitarian rule of utility, is not problematic in itself. Such philosophy is problematic, or dogmatic, when we take such principles as requirements for moral discourse instead of objects of comparison, if we take the yardstick as a picture determining the essence of morality or moral discourse. Wittgenstein

writes, “For we” – and I take Wittgenstein’s “we” here to be philosophers or the philosophical tendencies of human thought – “can avoid the unfairness or vacuity in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison – as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.)” (1953, § 131) Accordingly, the non-dogmatic view on ethics I explore is not a criticism of moral philosophy as such, only of our tendency, or the danger, of taking one of them, or the philosophical discourse about morality, as comprising moral thought or all of what may be of moral importance to us. The struggle against dogmatism in philosophy is itself a moral work that aims at clarifying our own moral standing, as philosophers, and gives us the responsibility for our moral lives, by giving us the responsibility for the moral discourse. This means that we may use moral principles and moral concepts, but also that we must be clear about what we are doing when we use them.

In the following, I consider how a literary work can provide a way to work on our preconceptions in ethics and resist our tendencies to limit moral discourse to the principles of moral philosophy or particular “moral” concepts. In Stian Hole’s powerful, even ingenious, picture book *Garmann’s Summer*, we follow, through an innovative artistic use of computer-edited pictures, the six-year-old Garmann’s investigation of fear, death and the social demands of schooling. We meet Garmann at the end of the summer when he is about to start school and at one point we are shown one of his hiding places.

Surrounding the garden is a hedge with secret passages inside. Hundreds of tiny sparrows live in there. If Garmann sits absolutely still, they will come out. He creeps in and gives a few crumbs to the birds, who twitter and warble with delight.

There is a dead sparrow on the ground. Garmann picks it up in his hand and strokes it gently. The grey feathers at the back of its neck are still soft. He puts the bird in a big, empty matchbox and buries it in the ground. Then he makes a cross with two sticks and places it on top.

Garmann hears the aunts’ voices, laughter, and the clink of coffee cups in the garden. When you die, you travel in the great starry wagon in the sky, thinks Garmann, but first of all you have to be buried (Hole, 2006).

Can we write this in any different way? Is it possible to get the full sense of what’s going on here without the picture? The words of the book actually say what the picture illustrates. Still we seem unable to respond to this passage in the same way as we would if we read with the pictures. Something is clearly lost. Can we imagine saying this in some other way? Of course we can. But would that really be saying the same thing? Can we really say what is lost in translation? *Garmann’s Summer* is certainly a blurry rectangle.

This is clearly one of those moments Diamond refers to. Concepts such as “right” and “wrong” are morally insufficient in responding to this story, but it calls for a response. Rather, to be emotionally and intellectually detached from Garmann’s tender care, and the tenderness with which he is described and depicted, seems inhuman. Garmann has a relationship with these birds. He feeds them and shares their hiding place, and he patiently awaits their appearance by being still, showing that he understands their fears. The death of one of them means much to him. It means so much that the bird needs a funeral. It is of course not unusual to bury animals. Garmann, however, holds the funeral alone, accompanied only by the birds in the shelter they share. Moreover, this event occurs at a time in the story when Garmann has just discussed fear and death with his elders, and everything is about to change: his dad has just left on tour with his orchestra; his aunts are about to leave, not to return until next summer; Garmann is just going to ask Mum about her fears; Garmann is about to start school.

So, how do we respond to *Garmann*? We are invited into the world of Garmann and to engage in the search for peace and relief from fear. A response to this involves an acknowledgement that this is a person, a human being, someone who bleeds when we prick him and laughs when we tickle him; who, despite being a child, represents us all as human beings. In response to this story we acknowledge his fears, his curiosity,

and is moral awareness of animals, human characteristics. Such acknowledgement may not come as a result of and need not involve explanations of moral concepts and appropriate behaviours, but rather requires a certain sensitivity to the persons we engage with or the work of art we are approaching. The ethical demand of this narrative is to *acknowledge* the protagonist. All I can do is to give different examples of this. I cannot say more than the book and its pictures.

Moreover, this story has several meanings and invites many different responses. We may draw several rectangles in reading it, none that is the same as the actual story and its pictures. We may even read it as suggesting that certain actions, thoughts or practices are to be prohibited and others promoted. We may read the story as providing reasons or being a contribution in a rational deliberation about death, fear, childhood or schooling. However, if we accept that this story, or other stories, may have moral points that are not captured by our moral concepts, but that these kinds of stories are constitutive for moral rationality, such readings lack something. But isn't the point of moral philosophy to give us a rational language that may guide our thoughts about our lives, in this case about fear, death and schooling? Can telling or reading a story really be constitutive of moral *rationality*?

There are at least two ways to defend my position in light of such questions. First, one may argue that telling a story and responding to a story is not giving *rational* reasons, but such reasons are dependent on more than rational aspects of human life. Second, one may argue that a rational response in a moral debate involves more than just a *narrow* form of objectivity where subjective sensibilities are excluded as irrelevant (Crary 2007 p. 20-21), which means that we rather need a wider conception of objectivity where moral rationality is construed as involving an "expression of a sensibility internal to all of a person's modes of thought and speech" (Ibid., p. 95).

The latter appears to be the more convincing response to these questions, although Alice Crary, when introducing the idea of a wider and a narrower conception of objectivity and consequently of rationality, appears to argue for the former idea. She maintains that "a person's ability to make the connections constitutive of a rational line of thought presupposes sensitivities characteristic of her as a possessor of a language and on which modes of discourse that cultivate a person's sensitivities may therefore make direct contributions to rational understanding in the virtue of doing so" (Ibid., p. 128). Such a conception of rationality certainly is useful in arguing for using literature in philosophy, and in particular in moral philosophy, which involves an understanding of moral philosophy and literature as engaged in moral thinking beyond the use of traditionally moral concepts. Nevertheless, such an understanding may mislead our understanding of rationality and the role of literature and art in rational modes of thought.

I think Crary's position needs to be strengthened to say that rationality is not only dependent on "sensitive characteristics," but that rationality is constitutive of, as Crary puts it elsewhere, a "sensibility internal to all of a person's modes of thought and speech," or, put differently, rationality involves both a person's sense and sensibility. I think Crary's own exploration of Wittgenstein's thought suffice to establish this. She concludes, "We might say that here Wittgenstein is inviting us to see that our concepts, far from being instruments for picking out contents that are independently available ..., are resources for thinking about aspects of the world to which our eyes are only open insofar as we develop certain practical sensitivities" (Ibid. p. 25). Accordingly, without having certain "practical sensitivities" we cannot even see or think of certain aspects of our world. Crary exemplifies this in two ways first by showing how works of literature – her example is Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* – may change our understanding of certain concepts, and how changes in our societies have given certain concepts, such as "sexual harassment" and "domestic violence," very particular moral connotations. She lets us follow Austen's protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice* in order to see how the conception of pride may gradually change or develop and how that helps us *see* the many different phenomena such a concept may involve. Later Crary shows us how seeing sexual harassment and domestic violence are "intelligible only in terms of a certain evaluative perspective" (Ibid., p. 165) and thus subjective – that is, a perspective determined by an understanding of social structures of inferiority of men over women that has become visible by women finding employment in areas previously exclusive to men. Hence, some

concepts with moral impact, such as some conceptions of pride, sexual harassment and domestic violence, are not even comprehensible given a certain perspective, a certain way of seeing.ⁱⁱ

Let's look at another suggestion in *Garmann's Summer*. Garmann is scared of starting school.ⁱⁱⁱ

"How do you feel about starting school? Do you have butterflies in your tummy?" Auntie Borghild asks.

"I'm scared," Garmann answers, wondering how butterflies get into your stomach.

As in so many other pictures in this book, we can see Garmann's worries in his eyes and facial expression. As we look at the picture of the boy and his thoughts about x-raying his stomach to see the butterflies, we can see the fear in his eyes. Even when he smiles, which is only on the opening page, we can tell that something is bothering Garmann. Seeing this is important for our acknowledgement of Garmann.

When his aunts understand that Garmann is scared, they respond.

Auntie Ruth furrows her brow. "I'm scared too," she whispers. "Soon I will have to use a walker with wheels."

"You can borrow my skateboard," Garmann answers, imagining Auntie Ruth skating along the pavement at full speed! Auntie Ruth laughs.

In this picture we are again invited into Garmann's imagination and are shown Ruth on a skateboard flying through a city like Tony Hawk himself. These pictures of Garmann's imagination are a relief in the story. In all of them we see the Aunts smiling, looking genuinely happy.

We follow Garmann through an investigation of his elders' fears. Auntie Borghild, when asked by Garmann, says she is scared of leaving Garmann when she dies, but adds that she is excited to fly into the big garden she has told him about before. Auntie Ruth responds that she is scared of "the long winter." "All old ladies are scared of the winter – the cold, dark nights and snowplows and slippery pavement and shoveling snow. And trudging through the snow in heavy boots with a walker." Garmann finds it strange anyone could be afraid of winter. The pictures show his smiling snowmen on one side and an old woman struggling through the impossible snow with a walker on the other. Auntie Augusta isn't scared of anything, and Garmann concludes that it is because of her poor memory. "If you can't remember anything, you have nothing to be scared of, Garmann thinks."

When Garmann turns to ask his parents about their fears, the pictures change. Garmann is now turned away from us. Talking to his father we see him from behind and when talking to his mother he is hiding in the bushes. We can't see him.

"Are you scared of anything?" Daddy and Garmann are sitting on the doorstep drinking juice. Daddy doesn't seem to hear the question.

[...]

Tomorrow Daddy is going on tour with the orchestra. Garmann has seen the black suit and the violin case ready in the hall.

"I'm scared of leaving you and Mama," Daddy says finally. "And I always get scared before concert. What if I play to fast?" He takes a deep breath. "I think everyone is scared of something."

"Even Hannah and Johanna?" [Hannah and Johanna are Garmann's twin neighbours that seems to know everything he does not know. They lost their front teeth, know how to read and ride a bicycle.]

"Even Hannah and Johanna," Daddy says.

Then he goes to the attic to practice.

We learn something about Garmann's fear. He is alone. Even though everyone including Hannah and Johanna also may be afraid and this may be an important insight to Garmann, he is left alone to deal with his

fears, and they are surely different from the self-assured twins', his parents' and aunts' fears. Garmann doesn't say anything about his fears other than that he is scared of starting school and some of the fears of his elders are not fully comprehensible to him – Auntie Ruth's fear of winter for example. The inner struggle of this boy comes out as a dissonance, something not fully reachable for his elders. But we can reach him! We are invited into his world of imagination. We are given a chance to emotionally engage not just in his words, but the whole mood of the book tells us something about Garmann's inner life. Our perspective changes and we can engage with Garmann as if his world was ours. Seeing this we understand the words in Garmann's questions differently. What do these words mean outside the context of this story, without knowing more about what is on Garmann's mind, where he comes from and where he is going? What does it mean when Garmann asks his elders what they are scared of? Are his questions rational?

If we cannot fully understand Garmann's questions about fear outside the context of this book; then what has that fear got to do with morality, or moral rationality? Fear isn't a moral concept, is it? If we cannot see how our perspective on children's fear, on starting school, on thoughts about death changes, that Garmann's question are rational, can be transformed by reading the book, then a certain evaluative perspective is lost to us. However, as we gradually experience Garmann's fear of school as a fear of death our sensitivities may change. His fears become more and more comprehensible to us each page we read. We grow from dissonance to harmony with Garmann. This change of perspective cannot be put into words or forced under concepts, but is experienced in our interpretation and attitude towards something, towards Garmann, towards children and schooling. We come to see schooling as frightening, without even being shown a school or a classroom. It dawns on us. It is a rational understanding beyond words, concepts and judgments: a claim to a common approach to the world. It is moral because it involves our response to another person as a person with fears and joys like ours and because it transforms us and our conditions for understanding and feeling. It is a revelation of a previously unseen aspect of the world.

To read *Garmann's Summer* without a sensible engagement to the tenderness of this boy and the tender attention of this boy to the dying bird – a part of himself leaving him as he prepares for school, or so he appears to believe – is like thinking of the other without considering how we actually respond to others that bleed, sweat, freeze, get sick, are healed, eat, get hurt, laugh, etc. We miss aspects of the other as being a human like ourselves. This is clearly a moral point. A point that is internal to morality, but which goes beyond moral concepts and any narrow conception of rationality. We find that moral philosophy in its objective aspirations is incomprehensible without this, say, tacit seeing of aspects of the world, in this case, as a scary place (Burbules & Smeyers, 2008, p. 173). Morality and moral philosophy thus understood is constituted both by our language and our sensibilities as two inseparable aspects of rationality. The emphasis is on the role of moral thinking in our life. As Diamond put it in her, to my mind successful, attempt to compose a Wittgensteinian moral philosophy:

Justification in ethics as anywhere else, goes on within the lives we share with others, but what we make count in that life is not laid down in advance. The force of what we are able to say depends on its relation to the life of words we use, the place of those words in our life; and we may make the words tell by argument, by image, by poetry, by Socratic redescription, by aphorism, by Humean irony, by proverbs, by all sorts of old and new things (Diamond, 1991 p. 28).

This suggests that morality must not necessarily involve a laying down of requirements for the intelligibility of its discourse. The responsibility for moral discourse does not lie outside the single philosopher or speaker's lives in some pre-given rule or dogma. There is no one rectangle that finally determines morality.

II^{iv}

Literary narratives, or any work of art, may illustrate philosophy's struggle between making universal claims (as if they expressed a transcendental essence of ethics, language and thinking) and the autonomy of the human being in saying, thinking, or doing something of her own (Eldridge, 1998 p. 21-22). Literature contextualizes such philosophical struggles. It serves to give philosophy life, the life needed for a philosophical

account to have a meaning in our particular lives. Thus philosophy and literature is jointly engaged in a struggle against each other and with each other, both demanding aid from one another. Philosophy's claim to universality is tried in the court of particularities of human life when given in the context of a literary character's history.

I take this image to correspond to, even as a different version of, Kant's image of humanity as living in two worlds. A world of sense and a world of understanding, where the former is the world we live in through our senses, and the latter is the world we aspire to live in as moral beings (Kant, 1997 4:446-463). Responding philosophically to literature, film, art and possibly also music is a way to articulate the world of understanding, but without succumbing to the dogmatic tendencies to articulate such a world solely by using moral concepts. This makes it possible to keep to Kant's distinction without taking it as a metaphysical "truth," but rather taking the distinction to show at least two different aspects of our lives. In responding to literature through a critical engagement, we engage in a kind of self-reflection, as if we were the persons in the narrative. In responding to literary narratives we say something about how we want the world of understanding, or as Kant sometimes put it, the kingdom of ends, to look like (cf. Cavell, 1981 p. 99-100). This is a conversation between the particular and the universal.

This Kantian approach to literature involves, as Eldridge (2001) emphasizes, a view of literature as having a very particular role in our moral lives, in moral reasoning. Philosophy's struggle between universality and particularity can also be expressed as a struggle to live a moral life of freedom. The world of sense, nature and society's pressure resists our attempt to take a moral position, to live a moral life and to act autonomously. We may in moral despair, following what I take to be the question underlying many of Kant's major texts, ask whether a moral life – whatever we imagine it to be – is even possible under the pressures of society and causality (Kant, 2000 5:176).

Put somewhat differently, how can we ever act as free autonomous beings if our action is determined by natural causality and norms of society or the concepts we take as moral? Are children really free to use words however they want? How else do we understand it? It seems as if we are both subject to and in need of resisting social conformity. Am I really morally responsible for my life if my life is determined by social norms and natural causality? Can I resist the dogmatic pictures that lie in our moral language and really be autonomous? Is the answer really a morality without or beyond moral concepts?

Let's look at these questions by returning to Garmann "not for illustrations," as Cavell puts it, "but for allegories, experiments, conceptual investigations, a working out of this complex of issues" (Cavell, 1988 p. 229-30). According to the Kantian and Cavellian perspective I maintain, this is what literature is, or what genius in art is. (Indeed *Garmann's Summer* is as much a work of literature and as a work of art.) Garmann is a boy with a special eye for the nature around him. In the first picture where he is holding a bouquet of wild flowers we are told:

Garmann closes his eyes and thinks of black slugs, itchy mosquito bites, and starting school.

He opens his eyes again and looks at the apple tree. The branches are like crooked fingers pointing to the sky. Soon it will be autumn.

Garmann can be described as a Kantian genius who has "the inborn predisposition of the mind... *through which* nature gives the rule to art" (Kant, 2000 5:307). Garmann gives us, here and in other places of the book, a standard rule to judge. As the work of genius shows a new way of looking and a new kind of object, a new concept (Kant, 2000 5:311-13), Garmann not only appreciates the beauty of nature, he looks at nature with an imagination that recreates his sensible experience into new rules for the beautiful – the apple tree reaches for heaven. Interestingly Garmann does this in response to fear, the fear of starting school. When Garmann closes his eyes he gives a judgment of nature, but when he is reminded of school he looks at nature differently and starts telling a story. Garmann's story about nature becomes, in Eldridge's words, an "allegory of the possibility of human freedom and self-understanding in the world and an indication that such an achievement is possible" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 77-78). Garmann's narration of nature is a creative construction

of new rules for such a narration, which is a means for him to express his freedom in the face of the compulsion to go to school.

Furthermore, it is possible to see genius expressions in the ordinary responses to nature and human society in everyday situations such as this. Such genius is *auto-nomous* in a very literal sense. As the Kantian genius gives the rule to art, the moral genius gives rules to morality, rules that may be independent of our current moral language. Moreover, Garmann shows us that the Kantian genius is not, as some may maintain, something unique, found in but a few. In Garmann we find that genius can be found in the ordinary everyday experience of life most of us can recognize. Call this a democratization of genius (Day 2000, p. 104). Everyone has that “gleam of light which flashes across his mind” (Emerson 2003, p. 267), to use Emerson’s words. Anyone can judge for all; the particular and the universal merge.

We follow Garmann’s imaginary response to nature throughout the book. His aunts arrive on a boat “from another time”; his aunts shrink in the sun and they soon won’t be seen over the grass. Instead of using a walker with wheels, he imagines Auntie Ruth “skating along the pavement at full speed” on a skateboard. In response to Daddy saying about Mum that she has roses in her cheeks Garmann notices that flowers seem to have the same names as old ladies. Garmann’s most elaborate responses, however, lie in his imaginary response to death. He discusses death with his aunts and they share their feelings and thoughts about death. It is described in imagery that relates to the natural surroundings in which the discussion is set. Auntie Borghild describes dying as travelling through the sky, passing through a large gate into a garden similar, just bigger, to the garden they are sitting in, and which she just praised Mum for keeping beautiful. When the aunts leave, at the end of summer, we read,

Three deep blasts of the ship’s horn and the aunts leave town behind them. He watches them getting smaller and smaller. Soon they will be traveling into heaven.

They wave to Garmann until the boat is a dot merging into the clouds.

Garmann makes a connection between traveling into heaven – or “travel in the great starry wagon in the sky”^v as Aunt Borghild put it and as Garmann repeats it in thinking about his dying bird – and dying. His aunts are dying and the boat, in reaching the horizon, actually merges into the clouds, into heaven. That Garmann sees this connection does not mean he believes they are dying. They return every summer. Rather, that he sees that connection or that aspect of the event, is an aesthetic judgment. He gives a thoughtful and creative response to his aunts’ going away and his thoughts about death. As Kant (2000, 5:312) says, “Beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing.” The picture even contains an angel in the form of a dragonfly and the picture in which Aunt Borghild talks about her death depicts her as flying with dragon-fly wings followed by dragon-flies and other insects.

Furthermore, the narrative of death and fear in this book is also about a young boy’s fear of starting school. Garmann’s imaginary responses to his Aunt’s words are a way for him to work out the moral aspects of schooling as a way of dying. He is scared that this new stage in his life will mean that something in him dies and needs to be buried.

Following the young boy’s investigation of the concepts of death and fear, realizing that his investigation was also about the end of summer and the start of school, the story is a moral discussion beyond the existential questions about fear and death, beyond moral concepts. It is a story that involves our entire sensibility, not only our mind (Putnam, 2006, p. 119; 1984 p. 237-38). Hence this story, with its pictures, as so many other stories, may be conceived as a way to engage in moral discourse. The story certainly helped me to respond differently to my own children’s hesitancy in starting school. Reading it, looking at its pictures, still touches me and guides my ways of looking at schooling. In this way it is clearly a work of genius. In this way it speaks both universally, making claims about the meaning of schooling, and it speaks on the particular, of one boy’s fate and inner struggles with society’s expectations. The book expresses the possibility of

human freedom by resisting the conventionally established idea that schooling is necessary. It helps us to see that to children schooling may mean not only an education, an arena for learning, but also death.

This way of making universal moral claims, in letting the particular of one protagonist speak for all, means that even the most abnormal voice can speak universally for humanity. However, this also exposes the vulnerability of such dissonant voice, the danger of isolation. Will anyone stand at Garmann's side if school turns out to be as scary as he thinks?

III

Perhaps we can recognize ourselves, even as philosophers of education, in the final words of *Garman's Summer*. As Garmann looks with worried eyes through the open window of a nearly empty room we read:

The wasps on the windowsill are dozy. His sixth summer went much too fast, Garmann thinks. As he buckles his backpack, he can feel a cool breeze. From the corner of his eye he sees the first leaf falling from the apple tree. [The same apple tree that reached for the sky?] Before he goes to bed he checks his teeth one last time to see if any are loose.

Thirteen hours to go before school starts.

And Garmann is scared.

Philosophy may be truly terrifying when we realize that we are responsible for its universal claims. Moreover, philosophy is really terrifying if it, as schooling, takes the responsibility for who we are and how we live from us by laying down metaphysical requirements for our thoughts and actions. This seems to be Garmann's real fear. Can he really continue in his wondering awe of nature the same way after his teachers have told him what to think? Perhaps Garmann is right to be afraid. He can either persist in his imaginary interpretations and face the danger of being unschoolable, unintelligible, or he can conform to schooling. Cavell's moral perfectionism, as a morality beyond our concepts, is an appropriate response to this dilemma in that it "challenges ideas of moral motivation, showing ... the possibility of my access to experience which gives to my desire for the attaining of a self that is mine to become, the power to act on behalf of an attainable world I can actually desire" (Cavell, 2004 p. 32). As educators, as teachers, we can converse with Garmann and become a part of the world he desires. Do we want to? Is he right to fear us? Can we really sense his fear? Or is our understanding of the role of schooling bound by our dogmatic requirements for what a (moral) education consist in? Is there room for Garmann's genius in our schools?

Thus Garmann leaves us, looking fearfully into the distance for something else.

Notes

ⁱ Here I use "show" in the Wittgensteinian sense of trying to show his readers out of the fly-bottle (Wittgenstein, 1953 § 209), emphasized by Peters, Burbules, Smeyers (2008/2010, p. 14, 215). Wittgenstein aims to show us where we get lost in our thinking and show us how to find our way out of the captivity of our confused thoughts. Moreover, "show" in Wittgenstein, as also noted by Peters, Burbules and Smeyers, is meant shed light on the dawning of a new aspect of meaning or significance of something, or as Wittgenstein puts it, of us seeing a new aspect. This is perhaps more in line with what I am doing here. I attempt to show new aspects of morality, schooling and education.

ⁱⁱ Arnold Davidson (1987) presents a similar argument, also influenced by Cavell, but concerning the emergence of the concept "sexuality."

ⁱⁱⁱ Here it is important to remember that Garmann is afraid of his school start, not of education or learning. It is clear, from this book and its sequel, that he is eager to learn. But his learning so far seems to have been on his own terms, through his own wonders and questions.

^{iv} Some of the reworking of this section is strongly indebted by Pradeep Dhillon's (1996) "Unhomely Readings of Philosophy's Fictions" & (2001) "The Longest Way Home: Language and Philosophy in the Diaspora."

^v In the original Norwegian text Aunt Borghild says, and Garmann repeats about the bird, that she will travel in "Karlsvogna", which is the name of the sign of the Zodiac referred to as the Plough.

References

- Burbules, N.C. and Smeyers, P. (2008) *The Practice of Ethics and Moral Education*, in: Peters, M. Burbules, N.C. Smeyers, P. *Showing and Doing: Wittgenstein as a Pedagogical Philosopher* (Boulder, Paradigm Publishers).
- Cavell, S. (1979) *The Claim of Reason*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Cavell, S. (1981) *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press).
- Cavell, S. (1988) *In Quest of The Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago University Press, Chicago).
- Cavell, S. (2004) *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press).
- Crary, A. (2007) *Beyond Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press).
- Davidson, A. (1987) The Emergence of Sexuality, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 14 No. 1.
- Day, W. (2000) Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvization and Moral Perfectionism, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 58, No 2.
- Diamond, C. (1991) *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MIT Press).
- Diamond, C. (1996) Wittgenstein, mathematics, and ethics: Resisting the attractions of realism, in: Stern, D.G. & Sluga, H. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Dhillon, P. (1996) Unhomely Readings of Philosophy's Fictions, in: *Thesis Eleven* (Cambridge, Sage, 1996).
- Dhillon, P. (2001) The Longest Way Home: Language and Philosophy in the Diaspora, in: Kachru, B.B. & Nelson, C.L. (eds.) *Diaspora, Identity and Language Communities in Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 31:1
- Eldridge, R. (1989) *On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism, and Self-Understanding* (Chicago, Chicago University Press).
- Eldridge, R. (2001) *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Hole, S. (2006) *Garmann's Summer* Don Bartlett, trans. (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers).
- Kant, I (1997) *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Gregor, M. ed & trans. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Kant, I (2000) *Critique of Judgment*, Paul Guyer ed. and trans. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Kuusela, O. (2008) *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy* (Harvard, Harvard University Press).
- Peters, M. Burbules, N.C. Smeyers, P. (2008/2010) *Showing and Doing: Wittgenstein as a Pedagogical Philosopher*, Paperback Ed., (Boulder, Paradigm Publishers).
- Putnam, H. Philosophy as the Education of Grownups: Stanley Cavell and Skepticism, in: A. Crary A. & Shieh, S. (eds.) *Reading Cavell* (Oxon, Routledge).
- Putnam, H. (1984) "The Craving for Objectivity," in *New Literary History* vol 15 No 2.
- Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations* 4th ed. (trans.) Anscombe, G.E.M., Hacker, P.M.S. & Schulte, J. (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1953).
- Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1980).