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Ethics of Sharing

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The Un/Ethical Demand:
A Responsive Approach to Sharing and Its Ethics

Abstract

Many anthropological theories address food sharing as an intentional act, asking what motivates people to give. They show how one gives for generosity, reciprocity, or becoming virtuous. In these views, the answer to the ethical question of whether to give is to be found inside the giving self. However, for Damara pastoralists and others, sharing is often initiated by the beneficiaries. To address this, I propose using Bernhard Waldenfels's responsive phenomenology that locates and theorises the mainsprings of ethical action beyond the subject. According to Waldenfels, *Fremdheit* (alienness) is a salient dimension of how the world appears to us. This alienness solicits us; it causes a demand to which we must respond. With sharing, the 'needs' of others are alien. They include the needs of those giving and demanding, and of others present in the situation. The pre-reflective response to these demands is almost always *mās ǀguisa ra hî*, one just gives. Only in select cases is a reflective choice made, where (1) multiple demands compete and (2), importantly, the alien largely withdraws from the attempt, sticking out and exceeding the ethical orders of the everyday. I conclude by showing how sharing and its ethics can be theorised as an interplay between the habitual and creative response to the demands that situations create.

The Un/Ethical Demand:
A Responsive Approach to Sharing and Its Ethics

Michael Schnegg

Introduction

Food sharing secures livelihoods and belonging within communities. Anthropologists have typically theorised these transfers as intentional acts in which someone gives to someone else.[1] The question of what motivates people to give has guided this research, and common explanations have included generosity, reciprocity, and virtues. In these views, one shares because (1) generosity is valued amongst the people with whom one lives (Sahlins 1972), (2) one has received or expects to need and receive in the future (Cashdan 1990; Gurven 2004), or (3) the practice of sharing co-constitutes a person as a virtuous being (Widlok 2004).

  The underlying assumption of these explanations is that actors are – and/or experience themselves as – the source of the act of giving. In this view, giving follows an impetus; it is an act that springs forth. Consequently, the ethical dimension of giving resides 'inside the box' of a giving self that evaluates whether to give or not against the backdrop of values (generosity), experiences and expectations (reciprocity), or larger life projects (virtues). I call these theories 'impetus approaches' to sharing and its ethics because impetus describes a force that encourages or impels the act of giving.

  For several years now, however, ethnographers have challenged some of the long-held views on the nature of these transactions. They have demonstrated that sharing is often not initiated by the giver but is the result of a receiver's demand (Peterson 1993; Schnegg 2015; Widlok 2017; Woodburn 1998). Demand sharing is characteristic not only of former and post-egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies but describes equally well the situation in which my neighbour comes to ask for an egg to bake a cake on a Sunday afternoon. Should this give us pause? Do we need a different theoretical model to conceptualise sharing and its ethics if it is not so much an initiated act but a response to a demand? My response in this article is that we do.

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1 A prominent exception is the work of Marcel Mauss. He assigns a significant amount of agency to the spiritual forces of the gift (conceptualised as *hau*), which must be circulated within the society. Mauss applies these ideas to durable material objects, not to food sharing, but I question whether or not they can be extended easily to the latter domain (Mauss 1925).

To this end, I theorise food sharing as an ethical situation in which we respond to the demands that a situation creates.[2] With this I follow a number of scholars who have recently turned the direction of the ethical question around (Dyring and Wentzer 2021; Mattingly 2018; Wentzer 2018a, 2018b; Zigon 2007, 2021). The established question of what motivates people to do good becomes that of 'What is the "appropriate" or "just" response to the demands a situation contains?' To answer this question, Waldenfels's responsive phenomenology is a valuable resource (Schnegg forthcoming). What seems to be giving is, in light of his phenomenology, a response or a doing that originates outside the actor in a realm that Waldenfels calls the alien (*das Fremde*) (Flatscher 2011; Leistle 2020a, 2022; Waldenfels 1994, 2010). The following episode from my fieldwork in rural north-western Namibia offers a glimpse why this might be productive.

Charles and I are neighbours. Charles considers himself a Damara (*ǂNūkhoen* in his language Khoekhoegowab) pastoralist.[3] He has lived most of his life in the hinterland of Fransfontein, a Namibian community 450 km north of Namibia's capital, Windhoek, where I have worked for twenty years (Schnegg 2021b, 2023; Schnegg and Breyer 2022). Like most people in the area, Charles keeps goats and sheep, less than 50 head, for meat and milk consumption and occasionally to sell in order to buy cloth or pay school fees (Schnegg et al. 2013). During one of my last stays Charles slaughtered one of his goats so that we would have meat to eat for the coming days. After he slaughtered the animal, he put part of the meat into a big pot on the fire. Then we sat in the shade next to it, from time to time stirred the pot, and talked.

Pete, a herder who lives in the community, came by whilst the meat was cooking. He joined the conversation but did not fully enter the yard. Whilst talking, Pete went around, picking things up, putting them aside, and keeping himself busy. When Charles felt it was time to eat, he put a second pot on the fire to cook maize meal. Peter was still there when the food was done. As Charles and I prepared to eat, Pete's presence began to articulate a demand. We could not begin eating without giving him a share. He of course knew this. That was why he came – and stayed. Standing there, smoking, stretch-

2   In the anthropological literature, the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' are, unlike in philosophical debates, often used interchangeably. When differentiations are made, they are not uniform. I perceive ethics as a more encompassing term that includes both unreflected ways of being and doing 'good' and 'right' things as well as the more abstract systems that orient, reflect, and justify these behaviours. For this reason, I largely think in terms of ethics in this article and only refer to morality when the authors I cite explicitly use this term.

3   Khoekhoegowab is a language of the Khoe-Kwadi family with four (primary) click sounds (ǂ – palatal; ǁ – lateral; ǀ – dental; ! – alveolar) that function like other consonants. Khoe-Kwadi languages belong to the southern African non-Bantu languages with click phonemes that, although not forming a single linguistic unit, are conventionally subsumed under the cover term Khoisan (Güldemann and Fehn 2014: 2).

ing out the conversation, he articulated a demand to which we now had to respond. Yet not a single word was said about food. When the maize meal was done, Charles went into the house to get plates and spoons. He handed them to us and served himself, Pete, and me. When I asked him later to explain the situation to me, he was surprised how I could question that he might not *mās |guisa ra hî*, which could be translated as 'one just gives'. Interestingly, in Khoekhoegowab the grammatical construction does not have a personal pronoun. Through the normalisation of the verb 'giving' (*mās*, from *mā*, 'to give'), the act is deeply rooted in the situation itself, just as in the English phrase 'the giving is being done'.

This type of demanding is common around Fransfontein and other parts of Namibia (Klocke-Daffa 2001; Laws 2019; Stutzriemer 2022; Widlok 1999, 2013, 2017). Amongst the Damara people it is referred to as *|goragu*. *|Goragu* describes a situation in which something that has been prepared at the house is shared, such as making tea or cooking food. The verb *|gora* means to separate, and the suffix *-gu* is a reciprocal that indicates that the relationship goes both ways. It is differentiated from other forms of sharing, most importantly *augu*, which happens when someone asks for something she needs specifically. *Augu* is a compound as well. *Au* is a composition of the verb *au*, which means 'to let, to give, to borrow', and the suffix *-gu*, which again indicates reciprocity (Schnegg 2021a). Whereas *augu* needs to be uttered to become clear and binding, *|goragu*, although also performed, is much more embedded in the situation itself.

I will illustrate this further with the following situation.

Shortly after we finished eating and Pete had left, Magdalena came. Like Pete, Magdalena was a member of the community, and they were both Charles's kin. She had assisted Charles in the past, as Pete had. When she saw the (second) pot – next to the pot for porridge, which is always there – she knew that something special like meat had been prepared. Referring to the pot, she said that she had not tasted meat for a long time and asked us if we could give her a piece of the leg, the part she liked the best. She *au-ed*, as people sometimes say in English. *Augu* is expressed verbally and is sometimes supported by a gesture in which the demanding person holds out an open hand as if she wants the other to put something in it.

Charles's response is ethical and a much more conscious choice. As mentioned, we had planned to eat the meat over the course of the next couple of days. Moreover, Charles had made a deal with Carla, a teacher from Fransfontein, to sell her part of the carcass so that he could buy his son the shoes he needed for the upcoming school year. For reasons I detail below, Charles did not give any meat to Magdalena. Whilst the ease of just giving would have most likely been his preferred response, these factors played a role, making it a much more difficult and conscious choice. However, so as not to offend Magdalena, he explained to her that he had made another plan and that he

would think of her the next time he slaughtered a goat. Magdalena accepted this and replied that she understood. How can this be explained?

Both situations occurred the same afternoon. Charles had what Magdalena and Pete wanted. According to the models on generosity, reciprocity, and virtue, he should have given both of them meat. They were neighbours, and he had received from them in the past and could expect to again (reciprocity). If generosity is a general cultural principle, it should apply for all interactions (generosity). And finally, if people are motivated by becoming or being seen as virtuous, this should also apply to all transactions (virtue). But why did he consider it right to give food to Pete and to reject Magdalena's demand for the same?

This article introduces an approach to answer this question. I theorise ethics as a response to the demands a situation creates, whilst simultaneously providing affordances on how to respond. With this, the focus shifts from ethics as an intentional act rooted in the subject and guided by, for example, practical wisdom, emulation of an exemplary person, or value realisation (the 'impetus approaches') to ethics as an 'appropriate' or 'just' response to the social situation and to others for whom we feel *respons*ible. In anthropology, the idea of responsivity was, to my knowledge, introduced through the seminal work of Jarrett Zigon (2007) on moral breakdowns and ethical demands. Zigon builds on Emmanuel Levinas, who argues that the infinity one experiences in the face (*visage*) of the other calls for a response, which creates ethical subjects. Therefore, to develop an anthropological theory of ethics, Zigon (2021: 389) extends this relationality beyond the other as a person, to encompass the 'between of the situation' space that calls for a response.

In a similar manner, Cheryl Mattingly (2018: 174), drawing from Bernhard Waldenfels, argues that ethical moments often occur unexpectedly in the everyday, striking with surprise. In her analysis of family life and its ethics among African American families in Los Angeles, she shows convincingly how situations become ethical when they transcendent expectations, norms, and routines, posing a call and demanding a response. In my analysis, I also draw explicitly on the phenomenology of Waldenfels because I find that he offers a more convincing explanation for what causes demands than Levinas.

For Waldenfels, the world appears to us as *fremd* (alien) as it exceeds the normative and symbolic orders which we use to structure it. In these moments, this alienness solicits us, causing a demand to which we must respond. This demand does not, as with Levinas (1979, 1984), originate in the experience of the ethical priority of the Other as the other person but is a genuine aspect of every experience (Wentzer 2020: 123). This makes it comparably easy and straightforward to apply Waldenfels's responsive phenomenology to experiences as diverse as reading this text, an accident, and my neighbour's demand for sugar and meat. As I attempt to demonstrate, a major advantage of such a responsive approach to ethics is that it can deal

effectively with (1) the embodied and affective dimension of ethical conduct and (2) its situationality. Before moving on to demonstrate this, some words on the social, political, and economic contexts in which sharing takes place are in order.

Ethnographic context

I first came to north-western Namibia 20 years ago when my wife and colleague, Julia Pauli, and I were looking for a place to do a community ethnography (Pauli 2019). Since then, I have lived for more than three years around Fransfontein and have experienced how sharing is part of the everyday and is structured by the economy, the ecology, and the region's colonial history. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the land around Fransfontein was occupied by the German colonial state. The Damara people (‡Nūkhoen), who had largely inhabited the region until then, mostly lived as hunters and gatherers with occasional contributions from livestock keeping, trading, and crafts. The occupation of land by the German military (the so-called Schutztruppe) and the establishment of a settler colony not only took away most land from the indigenous population but also introduced boundaries to people's mobile livelihoods.

From the start, the German colonial state needed labour for its political and economic projects. It started to collect taxes (for grazing, dogs, and many other things), a demand that forced people into the labour market and the colonial economy. At about the same time, and with support from the state, the Rhenish Missionary Society (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft), a Protestant church organisation, established a permanent settlement in Fransfontein, which included a school and a church. Thus, the settlement we know as Fransfontein today began with the combined efforts of colonisation and Christianisation.

With the end of the German occupation and the establishment of the South African apartheid regime, the colonial state extended the 'reserve area' it had established for indigenous communities. The colonial state bought neighbouring commercial farms and resettled Damara people from all over Namibia. But it was clear from the start that the land would be far too small to allow for a sustainable pastoral economy and livelihood for all. This was a deliberate act on the part of the colonial state, for it forced people into the labour market which was in constant need of workers, particularly in the mines (Schnegg et al. 2013; Sullivan and Ganuses 2020).

The social and economic consequences of these developments were immense. Fransfontein, a community where in the past people could make a living from pastoralism, hunting, gathering, and seasonal work, became a place where people depended on migration, remittances, and the state. Even now, whilst the higher-educated people work in towns, their children spend

their preschool years with relatives in Fransfontein. At the same time, those who leave for work still remain present in and part of the community. Fransfontein is where they keep livestock, spend Christmas holidays, and celebrate weddings and funerals.

With independence, the social and economic stratification initiated during apartheid increased (Pauli 2019, 2020). Because of these developments, most people in Fransfontein currently live a precarious life. Food sharing has always been a salient part of it.

Waldenfels and a responsive ethics

Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology, argued that consciousness, which he referred to as intentionality, is relational (Duranti 1999). We think, dream, and remember something *as something*. World and consciousness are intertwined. The phenomenological task, therefore, is to show *how* and *as what* things appear *in* consciousness *for* a subject, not so much how they 'really' are in the external observable world. Waldenfels builds on Husserl but gives the world–mind relationship a different direction (Wentzer 2020). The fundamental intervention of his phenomenology is to turn the arrow around. Building on gestalt psychologists like Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Lewin and their notion of *Aufforderungscharakter* (a demand character) or *Gefordertheit* (a requirement), which James Gibson (2015) later rendered as 'affordance' (see also Ingold 2018), Waldenfels argues that the mind does not reach out to ask, 'What is this?' Rather, the world asks us: 'What am I?' It affects us.

But why? This has to do with the world's most fundamental phenomenological property. For Waldenfels, the world presents itself as *fremd*. This holds true for objects such as this table, for feelings such as my pain, for other beings and their intentionality, and for basically everything. In presenting themselves as *alien*, 'things' solicit us; they call us. Waldenfels (2011: 87) refers to this calling as 'pathos', designating that when we experience 'things', something is happening to us, affecting us; to say it in German, something *widerfährt* (befalls) us. Basically, this demand requires a response.

In response, then, we apply some 'order' (*Ordnung*, sometimes also called *Antwortregister*, an 'answer register') to 'tame' the alien, attempting to control it, if you will (Waldenfels 1987: 164). Waldenfels uses order as a very general term that includes norm, symbols, concepts, world views, and much more. However, the order we apply never fits perfectly, and the phenomenon remains *fremd to me* as it exceeds and 'withdraws from' my attempt to order it. The ordering always partially fails, so the alien remains that which cannot be 'drawn into that order'. It is *extra*ordinary, as Waldenfels (2011: 83) says. According to Waldenfels, then, the phenomenon (that which appears or shows itself) emerges through the interaction of the demanding world and the re-

sponding subject: 'Erst im Antworten auf das, wovon wir getroffen sind, tritt das, was uns trifft, als solches zutage' (It is only in responding to what we are struck by that that which strikes us emerges as such) (Waldenfels 2002: 59).

Let me provide a brief example to illustrate how phenomena emerge at the intersection of demand and response. During my visit to Namibia in 2022, I was sitting at the fire with my friend Robert when I saw a piece of metal lying on the sandy ground. I could not properly identify it because it was partly covered in sand. It demanded an answer to the question, 'What am I?' So I picked it up. It was a coin, but it did not look familiar to me. I remembered how, as children in Germany, we collected coins and speculated on their origins and what they might be worth. The metal thing was asking: 'Can one use me to pay? What can I buy? Where do I come from?' It looked like something from Namibia. Given where I had found it, it was unlikely to have come from abroad; tourists do not come here. I looked at it more closely and tried to decipher the date: from the 1980s was all I could make out. When I mentioned to Robert that I had found a coin, he looked concerned. Better you leave it, he recommended. I did not understand and he explained: This is the space of my ancestors and it might be theirs. It can bring bad luck if we take it away. You know, they still come to visit as winds, birds, and other animals. Leave it. It's theirs.

In this example, the piece of metal appears to Robert and me through the questions it asks. *Being-in-my-way*, the 'thing' solicits a response. It calls for a response when it touches us as partly alien. The example also reveals how *what* the 'thing' asks ('to what do we respond?' in Waldenfels's words) originates in our way of relating to the entity, which has to do with the ways we use it and how we have gotten to know it before. There is a historicity to the sense of things. The demands the coin poses are to some extent questions it asks through us, or that we ask through it. Taken together, we begin to see how a responsive phenomenology can help us understand why the coin appears as something different to Robert and to me.

A salient aspect of Waldenfels's phenomenology is that the relationality between the demanding world and the responding subject is established through the *Leib*, the feeling body (Waldenfels 2005: 76; Waldenfels 2011: 43). Picking up the coin and remembering how I experienced similar situations as a child affected me in an embodied way. It recalled the enchantment about unknown countries I felt as a child. But Robert was affected too. His worry and fear made him answer unusually curt, and he felt uncomfortable.

Whilst the process of demanding and responding constitutes the phenomenon, the order that is applied equally stabilises through this interplay. Waldenfels gives an example for this: ordering my partner's behaviour as 'cheating' not only 'tames' the alien of my observation or feeling but equally stabilises the order of what cheating, in/fidelity, and partnership are. Even the very act of cheating does this. The order and the phenomenon are co-con-

stituted. In the same way, ethics as an order about doing right and wrong is constituted through ordering particular situations and the alien they contain (Waldenfels 2010). The *extra*ordinary – of the situation, but also more generally – is what exceeds the ordering, what sticks out and remains alien. It forces a much more explicit and reflective ethical choice to be made (Zigon 2007; Mattingly 2018).

Waldenfels's phenomenology is new in anthropology. Amongst those who have engaged with his work, Bernhard Leistle's (2022) contribution stands out. For one, Leistle has provided several introductions to Waldenfels's theory in which he focuses on Waldenfels's notion of alterity (Leistle 2016, 2020a, 2020b). For another, Leistle applies these conceptions effectively to the analysis of rituals, possession, and other ethnographic fields (Leistle 2014). In addition to Mattingly's fascinating work which I introduced above, other anthropologists and philosophers who have engaged with Waldenfels's approach include Lone Grøn (2017), whose rich ethnography renders Waldenfels's notion of responsivity into a responsive self. Maria Louw argues that the esoteric experiences of women in Kyrgyzstan may be seen as an example of radical alienness that casts doubt on interpretation itself (Lous 2019), and Lotte Meinert and Susan Whyte (2017) analyse processes of violence and trauma in northern Uganda through Waldenfels's phenomenology.

Furthermore, approaching responsivity as a philosopher, Thomas Wentzer (2018b) shows how the ethical is bound to human responsiveness as a fundamental characteristic of existence, and Rasmus Dyring (2018) demonstrates that the notion of responsivity allows rendering our understanding of freedom beyond our command and power. Finally, Dyring and Wentzer (2021) indicate how Waldenfels's thinking can be mobilised to study ethics more broadly.

All these authors utilise Waldenfels's fundamental revision of ethical responsibility: the subject does not initially or primarily act ethically by following their impetus or intent. Instead, the subject encounters situations in which they must respond – taking responsibility by answering the demands they experience (Waldenfels 2006, 2010). In the following ethnographic analysis, I build on these works and explore Waldenfels's framework for the study of sharing by asking (1) who or what makes demands, (2) what is alien in these demands, (3) how do people respond, and (4) how does this constitute the ethics of sharing.

Who demands?

Who demands? In sharing situations, the demand comes not only from those who ask for a particular thing, like Pete and Magdalena in my example. Ethical situations are typically characterised by plural demands. Otherwise no choice would be necessary (Laidlaw 1995; Robbins 2004; Zigon 2007).

With demand sharing, the demand comes first and foremost from the person who has not. Second, the demand comes from the self who ought to share. But how can I demand from myself? Simply because to some extent, wants, needs, and desires are alien to me as well. Do I know them? Often not! Third are the demands of other people present in the situation. Finally, there are the demands of the wider social situation. Let us consider the two situations described above to explore this further.

In the first encounter, when Pete came to demand some of the meat we were cooking, he makes an explicit, albeit non-verbal demand. He will not leave before we start to eat. However, in this situation it is not only Pete placing the demand. Charles makes a demand on himself, too. He wants to be a respected person, and not sharing would not feel good. When we talked about this later, he said: You feel bad. It hurts if you do not give. If Charles does not share, people might talk about him as being ǀgîxa, a man who does not give (literally, likely to refuse to give, from ǀgî, to refuse to give/share), something he surely wants to avoid. However, there are other people present as well. In this case, I also place a demand on him, to which he must respond if he wants to present himself to me in a particular way. And there are even demands from people who are not (yet) there, such as his children. They might come later and ask where the meat is when they see that the pot has been used. Finally, the wider social situation creates a demand: the pot is visible; the meat has an aroma; food is available in an environment in which meat is scarce. This shapes the value of the meat in the pot and the demand, too.

When Magdalena comes, the situation gets more complex. For one, Magdalena is making an explicit demand. For Charles, it is not only his self and the demand to be an ethical person but also his demand to be a good father that shapes his response. In addition, Carla (the teacher from Fransfontein), his son, and I are making demands. And again, the larger situation imposes or shapes the intensity of these demands. Because it is not entirely clear to Magdalena how much meat there is in the house, this decreases the intensity of her demand and makes it easier for him to avoid or ignore some of it. Even without lying, he can give the impression that there is really very little left beyond what is publicly visible in the pot.

In brief, both situations create multiple demands and Charles, as the person being asked, needs to navigate between them. To do so, he addresses the alien (*Fremde*) that these demands contain by trying to order it. This brings me to the second question.

What is *fremd*?

Ethics, as responsibility, emerges when people respond to the demand a situation creates, as Zigon (2021: 396) says. But why do we need to respond in the first place? According to Waldenfels, we need to respond because the other

contains something that is *fremd* (alien). This *Fremdheit* (alienness, state of being alien) is a basic property of all phenomena. But then, what is alien in sharing situations? In the situations I describe, the phenomenon that sticks out as alien is the 'need' of the other. When demanding, this need is presented by someone and presents itself.

In Khoekhoegowab, need is referred to as *ǂhâb*, which is the substantification of the verb *ǂhâ*, to want. We cannot know the needs of the other; we are often even unsure of our own needs. A need must be addressed. Through answering, we attempt to make this *ǂhâb* intelligible, to draw it into an order, as Waldenfels says. Thus, we apply some order – Waldenfels also speaks of an answer register (*Antwortregister*) – to it. It should be clear by now that this attempt cannot succeed as the alien withdraws from and exceeds the ordering attempt. It is *extra*ordinary. However, in our attempt to respond to it, to order it, we take responsibility, and the ethics of sharing – as an order – co-evolves through it.

To explore this ethnographically, it helps to consider the context in which the sharing takes place and the relationships people have with sugar, meat, and other essential goods. Fundamentally, the things people own (and others can demand) have specific purposes attached to them. Maize meal is the staple food. The sugar I have at my house makes the meal nutritious (calorie-rich) and sweet. These items, along with tea, milk, tobacco, and cooking oil, make up most of the goods that are shared. They constitute a class of things considered essential because they make up 80–90% of the diet for most households (Schnegg 2015).

One of the interesting aspects of this 'need' is that it is not primarily valued according to who has it. Whilst my need might be more important to me than yours, it is only slightly so. At least for essential goods, need is framed more abstractly. This applies not only to humans but to other beings, too. I remember how surprised I was when Charles gave some of the meat he had cooked to his cats and dogs. I asked him why he did this. The food, I said, would not even be enough for the family. He did not understand my astonishment. They are hungry, too, he said, and they also help us. The dogs take care of the goats, and the cats keep the snakes away. At the same time, such a tendency to equalise needs does not imply that it is unspecified. But what contributes to the intensity? Here immediacy comes in. For a need that is more removed temporally, like my desire to buy shoes, other solutions might be possible. These possibilities devaluate a need in comparison to a more immediate need, such as one with fewer alternatives that could develop before it is urgent.

Being ethical is, as Levinas says, always an attempt to compare the incommensurable. Making *ǂhâb* intelligible, I suppose, is a means to enable such a comparison. In sharing situations, the evaluation of these needs plays

a central role. They are done, as I will now show, through the body, through body language.

Responding

Embodied listening

This evaluation of the demand – or listening to the alien call, to use Waldenfels's metaphor – comes first and occurs through the body. After Pete left, Charles and I sat there drinking tea. I asked Charles why he had given so readily. I knew that his children were supposed to come later that day or the following day and that they would be happy to eat some meat too. He was truly astonished that I could ask this. Did you not see it in his face that he has not eaten for days, he replied. I had not. He had not said a word about eating or the food. I wanted to learn more and asked Charles how he knew. Well, you can see it already from the way he approached us. How humble or even shy he was. Remember how he was standing there, withdrawing all the time, going to the yard, keeping himself busy, looking at the ground? He was not feeling comfortable. Then you must also consider the time. People usually visit each other before or after meals when there is ample time to talk. But if someone comes more or less around the time of the meal, he either wants to cook something himself or get something from what you are cooking.

He continued to explain that this time it was especially obvious. You can see it from the lips, he says. The lips get dry. They open here on the sides. He touched his lips whilst explaining this to me. And you can also see it from the eyes. They fall deep inside. When I asked Charles how this affected him, he continued: We know how it is to starve. Since we were children, this has been part of our experience. This situation creates tremendous stress. You are *huio*, helpless. This is how it feels.

In Khoekhoegowab the suffix *-o* indicates that a particular property is not present. So *huio* literally means that the situation is without help. To explain *huio*, Charles continued: You wake up and this is all you can think of. How do I get something to eat? You cannot think of anything else. Your thought always comes back to that. How can I get some money, who can I ask? What will people say and will they support me? Those thoughts come again and again, and they do not leave you alone. In the end, you often go, even if you feel ashamed. Or if it is only for you, you decide to leave it and to wait for another day. Maybe a solution comes up without you stressing yourself all the time.

This description illustrates how Charles evaluates the needs of the other, in this case Pete, in an almost habitual and pre-reflective way. Given the shared experience of suffering, being with each other in the same embodied situation triggers a register that he only partly controls. He knows about

Pete's struggle to make a living, his situation, and never really questions it. It also circumscribes how he responds: com-passionate, we could say. When I asked Charles again why he gave, he answered, *mās |guisa ra hî*, one just gives, knowing and having experienced similar feelings himself.

In a recent article, Thiemo Breyer and I used Edith Stein's notion of *Einfühlung* to refer to situations in which the we does not actively 'read the mind' of the other but knows bodily and intuitively in a 'pre-reflective other-awareness' (Schnegg and Breyer 2022). Its importance becomes especially evident when we consider a case where bodies are not co-present. Whilst most demands for food are articulated in face-to-face situations, the rise of mobile communication and short messages has extended the practice of demanding to mediated spheres. Whilst making demands via SMS has become more popular, it changes the context in a particular way, as my encounter with Sen reveals.

I was sitting with Sen in a place called Rockies, the farming community where Sen kept his livestock and lived part of the time. Our conversation was continuously interrupted by beeps from his Nokia phone. It was just after payday, and I knew the situation well enough to ask him who it was and what she wanted. He laughed. He must be a popular man, I added jokingly. He replied, well, the popularity comes once a month and lasts for a day. In Namibia, pensioners, government employees, and other groups get their payments on a specific day and those days are well known. The twentieth is the day for teachers, the thirtieth is typically for pensioners.

On payday, people buy the most of their basic goods. Those who have some extra money might go to one of the nearby towns where food is cheaper and where they can also buy other goods like cloth. This month's end, Sen had already bought the basic things and had then driven to the rural hinterland, where the demands on him would be much less intense than in Khorixas or Fransfontein. The SMSs continued to come in, but he rarely replied. When I asked him why and how he felt about these demands, his response was clear. It made a big difference whether they were made via SMS or face-to-face, he said. On the phone, you can always pretend you did not see it. This is what he often did, he said. Waldenfels makes a similar point when saying: 'Jeder weiß, daß man sich fremde Ansprüche am besten vom Leibe hält, indem man wegschaut und weghört' (everyone knows that the best way to keep foreign claims at bay is to look away and not listen) (Waldenfels 2006: 43).

Sen also pointed out another difference. The lack of bodily co-presence makes it difficult to assess how essential the need is. It might be that they just pretend, he said. Or it might be that they want to do something entirely different with the money you send. How would you know? There is nothing you can do. It is also difficult to judge the immediacy of the need. Maybe the person does not need it right now and there is another solution to her problem. This unspecified immediacy leads to an opacity that makes it much

easier to deny a request and to defer it to some future point in time when one will decide and possibly help.

In brief, the embodied presence allows one to evaluate a demand and can give the demand a sense of urgency that makes it hard to ignore, thus restricting the answers to specific registers.

Pre-reflective and reflective answering

When I asked Charles why he shares, his response was *mās |guisa ra hî*, one just gives. This is the ethical order, an answer register that is utilised for responding to the alien. Partly, it is also a norm that has been socialised. In most cases, it can order the situation sufficiently well and people just give. In a survey in which I asked households about the demands they had made and received, an astonishing 91% of the demands led to transfers (Schnegg 2015: 318). This number supports what Charles said: *mās |guisa ra hî*. It took me some time to realise that this explanation was not an attempt to avoid a more detailed answer but was exactly what people wanted to say. It is a default that we might call a pre-reflective response in phenomenological terms. With 'pre-reflective', the phenomenological literature typically refers to an embodied being-in-the-world where we are so immersed in the world that we do not actively reflect on our way of feeling and doing.[4]

In some situations, however, the answer is 'no'. Recall Magdalena who also wanted a piece of meat or Sen who declined many of the demands that reached him via SMS. To explore the reasons for this, I build on work in the anthropology of ethics that deals with the relationship between pre-reflexivity and reflexivity (Robbins 2004; Schielke 2009). In his influential paper, Zigon (2007) mobilises Martin Heidegger to explore the relationship between the two ways of being morally in the world. For Heidegger, when we do practical, routine activities we are 'in the groove', a mode that 'covers' or obscures the true nature of the phenomenon. Other aspects of a phenomenon only become apparent when we disrupt these routines so we can see clearly. Heidegger (2006: 218) would even say that this is when we can find 'truth'. In his theoretical proposal for moral anthropology, Zigon (2007, 2014) furthers this argument to show how these breakdowns can become productive entry points for the anthropological study of morality.

The basic phenomenological distinction between reflective and pre-reflective ways of knowing and being-in-the-world is also salient in Waldenfels's work (Wehrle 2013: 84). Waldenfels, however, stresses the creative aspect of the response, also to differentiate his approach from simplistic stimulus–response models which he found in earlier psychological works

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4   When Thomas Widlok (2004: 63) says that sharing is not by default but by turnout, he has a slightly different perspective. He argues that sharing is constituted as a virtue through the practice of doing it and does not exist as something we can apply by default.

(see also Mattingly 2018). In my ethnographic observations, however, habituality and reflexivity/creativity clearly constitute a duality, two sides of the same coin. Whilst most responses are habitual, a reflective turning towards (*reflexive Zuwendung*, as Husserl termed it) is triggered in two moments: (1) the presence of a multiplicity of conflicting demands that Zigon (2007) points out and (2), importantly, the extent to which a situation remains alien and thus the inability to fit it into order. What cannot be fitted in sticks out as too *extra*ordinary, calling for a more reflective response.

The existence of multiple demands is already important in Levinas's (1979, 1984) work. Whilst Waldenfels initially adopted Levinas's arguments, in his later writing he warned against a 'Hypostasierung des Anderen' (hypostasis of the Other [my translation]), a fragmentation, if you will (Flatscher 2011; Waldenfels 2005: 231). He now proposes that ethical situations are better described as attempts to apply one order to the alien. According to this view, there is typically a single order that fits the situation, and a friction emerges when the phenomenon cannot be fully answered using this order (Waldenfels 2005). The alien is what exceeds this ordering attempt or what cannot be 'drawn in'. The more it stands out, the more it touches us. For an ethical situation and an attempt to order it, we can perceive the extraordinary, that which is not drawn in, as what poses the ethical question most explicitly. As it touches us, it might lead to a shift in our being-in-the-world from pre-reflective responses to reflexivity.

In philosophy, these two positions (the multiplicity of demands and the degree of alienness) have been considered conflicting interpretations of the 'situationality' in which we encounter the Other (Flatscher 2011). As an anthropologist, I prefer treating them as alternatives and will be asking whether and how they occur empirically. Both processes cause friction, leading to a shift in our moral way of being-in-the-world (Zigon 2007). In the cases I discuss, they help to explain why the pre-reflective response 'one just gives' does not fit and why transactions do not take place. With this, they allow us to identify and theorise why people share or refrain from sharing.

The first kind of friction – the multiplicity of demands in a situation – is common. I have shown this in the situations I experienced with Charles, Pete, and Magdalena (see Table 1 below). In the case of Magdalena, the demands conflicted to such an extent that they led to a reflective choice. For Charles, these demands included those of the teacher and of his son, and the demand to be a good father. All of them conflicted with the demand Magdalena made as well as the demand that came from attempting to be an ethical member of the community: to be known as someone who shares. Because the frictions were so pronounced, they led to an uncovering of normal habit and to what Zigon (2007) calls a moral breakdown.

My intervention is to add a second kind of friction that has not been discussed much. It occurs when the demand sticks out as especially alien or

when the order does not seem to match. This became evident in the situation in which Sen denied the demand placed via SMS. The embodied means he usually used to assess the needs of the other did not work, and the demand remained to a large extent alien. It could not be ordered and the way he responded was much more reflective; he eventually said no.

Such a moment – when the alien sticks out significantly – also occurred to me when Jacob, a man in his twenties, passed by the house where I was sitting with Tim, my host. We could see, as he approached from afar, that he was on his way to Fransfontein. Like many herders, he lived on the approximately 800 Namibian dollars he received for this job. He owned two or three sets of clothing (t-shirts and trousers) and, as he approached us, I could see the headphones around his neck, non-functional but a symbol of the style he preferred to project. We engaged in friendly banter, and it soon became clear that he had seen my car and hoped that I could give him a lift to Fransfontein. I replied that I would be staying a bit longer and would only leave in the evening, which was not what he wanted to do. Then he approached Tim and asked him if he could give him some of the food we were having so that he could eat on his way. Tim replied that the meat would still need some time to be cooked, which I knew was not entirely true.

When Tim and I talked about the situation a few days later, I asked him why he had lied. He explained: When Jacob and his friends go to Fransfontein, they just drink. Most likely he'll put the food in a plastic bag and sell it at one of the places where you can buy cheap, self-brewed beer. Then, when the alcohol is finished, they'll want more and, with the combination of alcohol and a group mentality, they will feel strong. Then they might come at night to steal a goat from our kraal. It is easy for them to steal because the dogs know them and won't bark. Even their footprints cannot be recognised as we find their footprints around the kraal all the time.

Jacob, like the others, created a situation in which he demanded something and in which his need affected Tim, demanding itself to be understood. However, this need did not fit the ethical order Tim had. Thus, 'the giving is done' when needs are essential and immediate. But the way Jacob dressed and his body language – proud, like someone dressed up for going out – indicated to Tim that he was most likely not going to eat the meat himself but use it for another need. In this situation, Tim's need sticks out as alien. I refer to it as exceeding the order of ethics – as a moment where it becomes a much more reflective choice whether this is right or wrong, ethical or unethical. Whilst in this case this leads to not-sharing, this need not always be the response, as shown in Table 1.

Demanding	Responding	Embodiment	Shared	Pre-reflective response	Cause of reflexivity
Pete	Charles	Yes	Yes	Yes	––
Magdalena	Charles	Yes	No	No	Multiplicity of demands
Numerous acquaintances	Sen	No	No	No	Alien sticks out as unethical
Jacob	Tim	Yes	No	No	Alien sticks out as unethical

Table 1. Comparison of the cases discussed and the demand–response relationships

Why and when do Damara people share? 'The giving is being done' happens without being initiated or intended. There is a profound and habitual relation to radical alienness here, couched in culturally particular terms. With this and as the empirical observations reveal, almost all demands lead to a transfer. But when is sharing denied and what are the ethics behind it? In terms of Waldenfels and the responsive phenomenology of the alien, the (not to give) responses to the demands of Magdalena and Jacob and the numerous acquaintances demanding from Sen can be characterised as ethical responses, that is, responses taking place within a particular system of ethics. At the same time, the demands are either multiple or hard to order, sometimes sticking out as *extra*ordinary, such that a more reflective choice takes place. In these moments, it needs to be decided whether it is ethical or unethical. This is in situations where the order does not fit easily, as in the interaction between Tim and Jacob, and where a much more active ethical choice becomes likely that might, and often does, lead to denial. Taken together, I refer to this duality as an open and creative response.

Conclusion

Most established approaches to sharing assume that, when acting ethically, we follow an impetus. The problems with these approaches are, for one, theoretical. As Waldenfels, Levinas, and other current theorists argue (especially Hartmut Rosa), the notion that we are 'free' to apply whatever principle we would like to frame a situation is questionable (Levinas 1981; Rosa 2019; Waldenfels 2010). Moreover, the problems are also empirical. In Namibia and elsewhere, many transactions follow an explicit demand; they start somewhere else, outside of control.

In this article, I have built on others – including Dyring (2018), Grøn (2017), Mattingly (2018), Wentzer (2018a, 2018b), and Zigon (2007, 2021) – to argue for an alternative to this 'impetus approach', a responsive phenome-

nology of ethics. Such a responsive approach takes ethics 'outside the box' of the self. Acting ethical now starts somewhere else. In my understanding, a major advantage of this is that, in locating the mainsprings of ethical action outside the subject, we can embed ethical action firmly in the situation that constitutes it, including the affordances and suggestions a situation makes. Therefore, we can explain the situational variations we observe (for example, why most of the time people give but sometimes do not).

To conclude, I address the limitations and advantages of a responsive approach to sharing and its ethics, and why we might want to further such an approach. I find there are at least four arguments.

First, approaches that make the acting agent and their impetus the starting point of the analysis of sharing tend to simplify the ethical dimension of sharing. Recent critique has rightly indicated that approaches such as 'reciprocity' run the danger of conceptualising marginalised people as following simplified rules, whilst equally holding that in industrialised societies these rules do not account for behaviours that follow 'more complex' decision heuristics. The responsive approach allows for addressing varied situations under one theoretical framework and with a less stereotyped view of social and economic relationships.

Second, most established sharing theories have relatively little to say about the affective and embodied dimension of sharing. As I have shown, this embodiment is an essential link between demand and response in Waldenfels's phenomenology. The co-presence often leads to an evaluation of a situation where sharing becomes a pre-reflective default. I would consider this as a major advantage of a responsive sharing theory.

Third, the focus on the interplay between pre-reflexivity, habituality, and embodiment gives us a way to theorise ethics that acknowledges the duality of being ethical without reflexivity and the explicit ethical choice. Proposing two processes that lead to this friction – (1) the multiplicity of demands and (2) the extent to which they stick out from existing orders, which makes them become *extra*ordinary – offers a way to link what many have considered to be two sides of the same coin in creative responsivity (Mattingly 2018; Robbins 2004; Schielke 2009; Zigon 2007).

Fourth, whilst the framework cannot explain how orders come about and why they differ between societies, it can explain how orders change over time. With each demand, the ethical order is challenged. If these challenges are so severe that they make it difficult to 'tame' the alien, a more reflective process takes place which has the potential to alter the order itself. We can image this interplay between demand and response as an interactive and creative game in which the order that has been challenged by the alien never remains the same.

In brief, sharing ethics are habitual and creative responses to the demands that situations create.

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