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The Epistemology and Ethics of Intentionality in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*

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Abstract

This article investigates the disjunction between predictive knowledge and genuine understanding in Ian McEwan's Enduring Love (1997), by bringing philosophical accounts of intentionality into dialogue with the novel's narrative representation of mind-reading. Drawing on John Searle's insistence on intrinsic intentionality and Daniel Dennett's conception of the "intentional stance" as a predictive heuristic, it argues that the novel stages a recurrent misalignment between what intentional states are about and how they manifest in behaviour. Joe Rose's increasingly forensic study of Jed Parry's actions allows him to successfully anticipate Parry's future behaviour by attributing to him a coherent set of beliefs and desires. However, this predictive success does not translate into genuine understanding or ethical responsiveness. Instead, this reliance on a rational, third-person framework of interpretation enables a procedural containment of Parry's distress while simultaneously undermining Joe's relational engagement with Clarissa. Through close textual analysis of the novel, the article demonstrates how McEwan's narrative problematises the assumption that epistemic access to another's mental life equates to interpersonal comprehension. Building on Stanley Cavell's distinction between knowledge and acknowledgment, it ultimately contends that the novel exposes the ethical insufficiency of interpretive knowledge when it substitutes prediction for response, thereby foregrounding the limits of epistemological approaches to intentionality in social as well as narrative contexts.

1. Introduction

The word "intentionality" appears only once in Ian McEwan's novel *Enduring Love* (1997), and that too in a seemingly minor context. It comes early in the narrative when Joe Rose, while researching for an article, comes across a letter "to *Nature* dated 1904, a contribution to a long-running correspondence about consciousness in animals" (McEwan, 2006, p. 41). In it, the writer relates an anecdote wherein a pet dog indulges in an act of deception in order to take possession of his favoured place. Taking cue from this story, Joe's article dwells on whether the dog's actions can be convincingly read as a pointer to his mental world, and as evidence of a preconceived plan. This, as Joe recognises, is the question of intentionality. After briefly speculating on a mechanistic explanation of this tale, Joe revisits his notes to find that the last words he had scribbled were "intentionality, intention, tries to assert control over the future" (p. 43). This is the sole occurrence of the word in the text. It is not something that the narrator dwells on to any great extent and the word is quickly forgotten. However, as I will try to demonstrate in the following pages, the question of intentionality — its epistemological opacity

in other minds and its ethical ramifications — remains central to the novel's philosophical and narrative conflicts.

1.1. Theoretical Framework: Intentionality as Intrinsic and Heuristic

Originally introduced by Franz Brentano in 1874, the term intentionality, at its fundamental level, denotes the 'aboutness' of conscious states — their inherent capacity to be directed toward something. As Wolfgang Fasching (2012) succinctly articulates, "Intentionality is the characteristic of mental states of being about or of something: to perceive means to perceive something, to think means to think about something, to remember means to remember something, and so forth" (p. 121). Our conscious thoughts, beliefs, fears, and desires all possess intentionality. Intentional states may also appear as goal-directed insofar as they are sometimes expressed through behaviour or action. It is this apparent goal-directedness that renders them available for third-person interpretation on the basis of observable behaviour.

In his seminal work *The Intentional Stance*, the philosopher Daniel Dennett (1996a) adopts a predictive and explanatory approach towards the subject and argues that intentionality is not necessarily an intrinsic property of consciousness but is rather a useful heuristic overlay. According to him, an entity is deemed an intentional system if its behaviour can be reliably predicted by attributing to it beliefs, desires, and rationality. By employing this stance, one treats the object of study as a rational agent, inferring its beliefs and desires from its situational context and objectives. Subsequently, Dennett notes, "a little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in many — but not all — instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent will do" (p. 17). The validity of these attributions is inherently pragmatic: they are considered "true" to the extent that they facilitate effective prediction, not because they align with some metaphysical or biological reality (pp. 17–18).

Our everyday interactions with the world populated by other potentially conscious beings necessitate such efforts to infer their intentional states based on their external manifestations. Often termed "folk psychology," this aspect of human interaction is frequently highlighted in novels, which "play on our need to fathom the deepest motivations of other people" (Vermeule, 2010, p. 65). McEwan's novels in particular, in their attempt to understand what is philosophically known as the problem of "other minds," repeatedly foreground such methods and the shortcomings inherent in them.

The structural limitations of this method become conspicuous when attempting to adopt it as an epistemological practice and Dennett's claim that it is "the key to unraveling the mysteries of the mind" (1996b, p. 27) sounds like a slight overestimation. Kriegel (2011) calls this stance "a good enough approximation of the truth to make it useful for everyday commerce, but not good enough that we can take it at face value" (p. 201). Firstly, not all intentional states manifest in action or behavioural change, and even those that do are susceptible to interpretive projection from the one studying them. More significantly, the goal-directedness of intentional states as manifested in behaviour does not necessarily reveal their aboutness to a third-person observer. This dimension can only be accessed from a first-person perspective.

John Searle, in his numerous works on the subject, emphasises this perspectival character of intentionality. For Searle, the aboutness of intentional states is not contingent on external observation or behavioural expression but is intrinsic to the nature of conscious experience. This is what Searle calls the 'intrinsic intentionality' of conscious states, and he distinguishes it from the 'as-if' intentionality of systems which only appear to be conscious. The former is genuine, experienced from a first-person perspective; the latter is attributed externally, as in the case of artificial intelligence or non-sentient systems that only seem to be directed towards particular goals (Searle, 1991a, pp. 47–51). 'Intrinsic intentionality', according to Searle, possesses an 'aspectual shape' — that is, intentional states are presented and are valid only under specific aspects (1991b, p. 51). For example, the desire for "water" is not necessarily the

same as the desire for "H_2O," even though both may point to the same physical substance. A person reaching for a glass of water might be driven by either of the two motivations (p. 53). The distinction between the two can only be discerned by the individual experiencing it. This is the 'aspectual shape' of the desire, which ensures that it cannot be entirely known or verified from a third-person perspective, resulting in "an inferential gulf between the evidence for the presence of the aspect and the aspect itself" (p. 55).

1.2. Intentionality and Narrative Theory

In narrative studies, it is largely the behavioural aspects of intentional states that are seen as the rationale or motivation behind a character's actions and are encapsulated in the term 'intention', which includes the said character's goals, plans, and motivations (Brooks, 1984, pp. 31–36, 90–114; Booth, 1983, pp. 271–338). This motivational aspect of intentionality underpins plot construction, as narrative progression is largely driven by characters' choices and desires. Pinker (1997) places goal-oriented behaviour at the very heart of narrative structure when he defines plot as the process through which "the protagonist is given a goal and we watch as he or she pursues it in the face of obstacles" (p. 541).

But how does it link up with the aboutness of intentionality — the way characters subjectively experience and represent the world? This aspect has received less systematic investigation in narrative theory (Doležel, 1998, p. 63; Palmer, 2004, p. 121). Aboutness is often dispersed across different narrative modes and rhetorical strategies, making it difficult to distinguish between behavioural observation and interpretive understanding. Yet, it is this aboutness that provides the internal coherence of fictional minds and renders their actions intelligible beyond functional terms. Notably, even David Herman (2008), who takes up Dennett's intentional stance as a potential tool for narrative enquiry in his essay "Narrative Theory and the Intentional Stance," restricts himself to the discourse-level question of authorial intention and the interpretative act of decoding it through the narrative. Herman briefly notes how fictional plots often turn on characters' construction of narratives that misconstrue their counterparts' motivations, intentions, plans, goals, and desires (p. 253), but leaves the implications of his propositions untested by not carrying out extensive textual analysis along these lines.

It is here that the present study intervenes, by taking into account both facets of intentionality in fictional minds — the behaviourally manifested motivational aspect (goal-orientedness) and the more intrinsic propositional aspect (aboutness). It thereafter examines, through close textual reading, the ways in which the two tend to align or misalign in McEwan's novel, calling into question the epistemological limits of investigating such a category in everyday life and within the narrative medium. Furthermore, the study critically evaluates the ethical ramifications that arise when predictive success proves to be insufficient for genuine understanding in a social and relational context. Drawing on Stanley Cavell's distinction between knowledge and acknowledgment, it asks whether the intentional stance, while pragmatically effective, can suffice as a basis for our attempts to reach closer to other minds.

2. *Enduring Love*: A Case Study

The inscrutability of the intrinsic aboutness of intentionality from its external manifestation is at the heart of the novel's very opening scene: the pivotal ballooning accident. It is an event that can appropriately be labelled as "an occurrence that results out of a failure to read the intentions of others. None of the five people […] is certain of the limits and capabilities of the other four" (Green, 2011, p. 446). Each participant is driven by a "commonality of purpose" (McEwan, 2006, p. 10), yet their shared goal-orientedness does not translate into shared understanding of one another's minds. In the heat of the emergency, as communication disintegrates into a "shouting match" (p. 11), Joe — and by implication, other participants —

faces a fundamental "mammalian conflict" between "what to give to the others and what to keep for yourself" (p. 14). This is not merely a conflict between selfish and altruistic urges (Palmer, 2009; Phelan, 2009), but a question of intentionality. And it appears in this scene not merely as an epistemic concern, but as one that determines the subsequent course of action, thereby carrying serious ethical weight.

The failure of the collective attempt, culminating in John Logan's death, raises two significant questions: firstly, can a more rational and calculated approach lead to greater predictive success? And does that success, if achieved, translate into a meaningful relational engagement with other minds? As the novel unfolds, and as the conflicts depicted in its opening scene keep recurring in increasingly intricate and complex guises, McEwan brings the epistemic pursuit of intentional states, particularly their behavioural manifestation, to a point of predictive success through the application of a Dennettian stance. However, this approach fails to reveal the Searlean 'aspectual shape', leaving the intrinsic aboutness of intentionality epistemically opaque.

2.1. Science and the Rational Stance

Joe briefly refers to precisely this opacity during his initial encounter with Jed Parry. As Parry's grey-blue eyes gleam, Joe recognises that he is excited, "but no one could ever have guessed to what extent" (McEwan, 2006, p. 24). However, when Parry's interest in Joe is gradually revealed as a genuine obsession and not merely an infatuation, Joe decides to take up a cold scientific and rational stance towards the situation. Joe's professional identity as a science writer partially explains this choice. This background underpins his rationalist outlook towards life (Greenberg, 2007; Mellard, 2007). But at the same time, it also relegates him to the periphery rather than the core of institutional science. Joe's insecurity about his failure to obtain a position in mainstream science surfaces repeatedly in the novel as an "older dissatisfaction" of his life (McEwan, 2006, p. 75). After finishing a science article for a magazine, Joe admits to himself that "What I had written wasn't true. It wasn't written in pursuit of truth, it wasn't science. It was journalism, magazine journalism, whose ultimate standard was readability" (p. 50). Later in the novel he articulates this concern in clearer terms, describing it as the anxiety that "all the ideas I deal in are other people's. I simply collate and digest their research, and deliver it up to the general reader" (p. 75). He adds that he probably would not feel this way if he "did not have a good physics degree and a doctorate on quantum electrodynamics," which makes him believe that he should have been "out there" at the heart of the scientific world (p. 75). His disappointment resurfaces at the beginning of Chapter 12 when he admits that:

> My sense of failure in science, of being parasitic and marginal, did not quite leave me. It never had really. My old restlessness may have been brought on afresh by Logan's fall, or by the Parry situation, or by the fine crack of estrangement that had appeared between Clarissa and me. (p. 99)

This unease at being a mere "commentator, an outsider to [his] own profession" (p. 77) forms an important part of Joe's propositional orientation and serves as a strong motivational force behind his subsequent actions. So much so that Parry appears to him as an opportunity for methodological mastery, a domain in which he can exercise the classificatory authority denied to him within institutional science. In his attempt to get "back to science" (p. 102), he almost overcompensates by reducing an obsessed stalker to a science project he was "impatient to research" (p. 127). Even during his visit to John Logan's widow in an attempt at redemption, his mind is preoccupied with Parry's case and the scientific details of it:

> Even before we reached it, I was back with de Clérambault. De Clérambault's syndrome. The name was like a fanfare, a clear trumpet sound recalling me to my own obsessions. There was research to follow through now and I knew exactly

> where to start. A syndrome was a framework of prediction and it offered a kind of comfort. (p. 124)

This comfort is derived from Joe's conviction that he is now dealing with a subject amenable to systematic investigation. His treatment of Parry's case as a research subject gains momentum soon as he arranges Parry's letters in chronological order and marks out "significant passages […] with location references in brackets" (p. 151). After making three copies of these documents and placing each in a folder, he feels a "kind of organisational trance, the administrator's illusion that all the sorrow in the world can be brought to heel with touch-typing, a decent laser printer and a box of paperclips" (p. 151).

As Parry's afflictions are turned into sheets of neatly typed papers, we can sense a cold rationalist investigation being carried out. It eventually turns out to be successful as a predictive tool, as the conclusions made by Joe — such as Parry's capacity for violence and his intention to remove Clarissa from his path — are mostly proven right by the future course of events. But the irony of the situation lies in the fact that here too, Joe's role is restricted to that of the science writer who merely prepares a dossier out of his materials and spins a convincing narrative out of it. He successfully predicts some of Parry's eventual actions but is unable to do anything to alleviate the situation in time, as a physician — a man of 'real science' — might have. This is something Joe realises agonisingly late and laments the fact that he was "getting things right in the worst possible way" (p. 215).

2.2. The Narrator, the Reader, and Parry

The reader is strategically positioned to actively engage with and reiterate Joe's speculative attempts to predict Parry's future actions. McEwan's narrative choices are meticulously designed to deny the reader any privileged insight into Parry's beliefs and desires beyond what is filtered through Joe's depiction of him (except for a few letters by Parry, which, if not tampered with by Joe, contain his own voice). In her work *Why We Read Fiction*, Lisa Zunshine (2006) identifies this as "second order intentionality" (p. 28), where the reader comprehends what character X perceives character Y as knowing. Consequently, Parry's motives are twice removed from the reader's grasp, as they are perceived externally through Joe's lens rather than explored internally. This narrative choice has drawn criticism from early reviewers such as Adam Mars-Jones (1999), who compares Parry to a character from a Ruth Rendell novel, adding that "in a Ruth Rendell novel he would have more access to the point of view" (para. 13). However, to critique McEwan's decision to employ Joe as the narrator is to overlook a fundamental aspect of the novel. It is not Parry's psychology or pathology, but rather the epistemological challenges inherent in comprehending other minds, that forms the novel's central inquiry (Palmer, 2009, p. 293).

Joe's narratorial voice, replete with self-doubts and anxieties of being misunderstood, and "continually fretting at the difficulties he has" (Matthews, 2007, p. 95), brings these challenges to the fore. Consequently, it also evinces a serious degree of unreliability to the story Joe tells (pp. 94–104). For a long time in the novel, the person closest to Joe, his wife, seems to doubt his version of the Parry story, even wondering whether Parry really exists or is a figment of Joe's imagination (McEwan, 2006, p. 86). At one point she shouts at Joe, "You say he's outside, but when I go out there's no one. No one Joe" (p. 148). The police officer Linley, in a tone of gentle mockery, echoes a similar sentiment by denying to "send officers to Citizen A on account of Citizen B reading a few books and deciding there's violence in the air" (p. 158). In the absence of any other viewpoint to corroborate Joe's story, the reader cannot help but share this uncertainty. As Susan Green (2011) maintains:

> The reader is placed in the puzzling and mirroring role of uncertainty, enacting psychologist William James's notion of the "barrier of belonging to different

personal minds," as they actively try to make sense of Joe, questioning his reliability as a narrator. (p. 447)

One of the effects of allowing an untrustworthy narrator to take control, as H. Porter Abbott (2002) points out, is that the "narration itself — its difficulties, its liability to be subverted by one's own interests and prejudices and blindnesses — becomes part of the subject" (p. 69). It is indeed the case with *Enduring Love*. Joe's intentional states, his beliefs and desires, his fears and anxieties, and the motivations behind his actions become as much the subject of the novel as the eccentricities of Jed Parry. In his interview with Jonathan Noakes, McEwan admits that he "wanted the reader to toy with the idea that Joe might be going completely crazy, or maybe even that Joe was Jed" (as cited in Roberts, 2010, p. 84). And as the discerning reader uncovers, the two minds are indeed more akin to one another than they initially appear.

When Joe's narrative is punctuated with Parry's letters, the latter seem to be far more coherent in structure than Joe's growingly paranoid story, suggesting that Parry's intentionality, in spite of being non-veridical, is clearer to his own mind than is the case with Joe. Paradoxically, it is precisely this internal coherence of intentions that renders his actions predictably intelligible to Joe through a Dennettian lens. As Jon-K Adams (1991) observes, "Intention can account for those occasions when irrationality seems to govern a character's actions because the attitude and beliefs that form the basis of an intention need not be reasonable ones" (p. 66). This raises profound questions about the nature of rationality itself. Parry's eventual behaviour, as predicted, underscores the intrinsic 'rationality' of his actions. His fervently religious worldview and his clinical condition, despite their apparent delusions, form a "bizarre, but internally consistent" (Draaisma, 2009, p. 431) cognitive framework sustained by its own rationale, leading to the accuracy of Joe's predictions.

Intriguingly, the 'rationality' of Parry's worldview also manifests in those letters in demonstrating a degree of predictive success with regards to Joe's actions. Joe's application of the intentional stance towards Parry is mirrored by Parry's attempt to do the same while reading Joe's science articles. He reads each article "as a letter sent by you into the future that was going to contain us both" (McEwan, 2006, p. 133). There is no doubt that his reading is tendentious and he is projecting the thought contents of his own mind while trying to attribute intentionality to Joe. But some of the conclusions he draws are in fact borne out elsewhere in the novel. He admits his own naivety, for example, in believing that "it could all come right simply because I wanted it so much" (p. 134) or the fact that it suits Joe's narrative to protect himself and project Parry as a "madman" (p. 135). Furthermore, he rightly predicts that Joe will eventually "feel anger" and will want to drive him away (p. 138). Even his earlier character summary of Joe — "you fight it so hard with your education and reason and logic and this detached way you have of talking, as if you're not part of anything at all" (p. 66) — demonstrates remarkable precision.

Both Joe and Parry seem to be assuming a mutual intentional stance in their attempts to predict each other's next move. Despite their worldviews being nearly antipodal, neither can exclude their own beliefs and fears from their inferences. "The question of shaping the 'evidence' to suit particular desired outcomes," as Martin Randall (2007) observes, "is as much an issue for the scientist as, by implication, any individual" (p. 60). Joe sees Parry as a pathological case, projecting his own rational beliefs as well as his insecurities onto the situation. Parry, on the other hand, sees Joe as a part of God's plan, reflecting his religious worldview and his desire for intimacy. And while they achieve some degree of predictive success, neither is able to get any closer to the subjective world of the other. As Greenberg (2007) accurately sums up, "both the novel's neo-Darwinian narrator and his primary antagonist, an anti-Darwinian religious stalker, become prisoners of their own narrative constructions" (p. 95). This points towards the success of the Dennettian stance in functional terms, while simultaneously revealing its limitations in terms of relational understanding. Predictability does not equate to comprehension. And that partly explains why Joe feels no "immediate comfort in vindication" but rather a "narrow sense of grievance" when his

anticipations are justified by "the accumulation of horrible certainties" (McEwan, 2006, pp. 213–214).

2.3. Acknowledgment Over Knowledge

In the crucial restaurant scene of the novel, just prior to the shooting, Clarissa — a Keats scholar — recounts the apocryphal tale of the young poet's meeting with Wordsworth. It is in the course of this discussion that she recites four lines from *Endymion*:

> Be still the unimaginable lodge
> For solitary thinkings; such as dodge
> Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
> Then leave the naked brain (as cited in McEwan, 2006, p. 168)

These lines, while ostensibly pertaining to Romantic interiority, articulate in a different discursive register the same epistemic limit encountered in Joe's attempts to render Parry's intentional states intelligible through behavioural analysis. The "solitary thinkings" that "dodge conception" point to a Searlean dimension of mental life that resists third-person modelling. As Spolsky (2015) points out, "even the best mind reading can never provide fully reliable information. Other minds are simply not transparent" (pp. 62–63). And yet the opacity of another's intentional life does not dissolve its claim upon us. Even where third-person modelling fails to secure understanding, the other continues to present themselves as someone to whom a response is owed.

Such a response requires not further epistemic calibration of the other's likely behaviour, but the willingness to respond to him as a subject rather than a "bundle of symptoms" (Dancer, 2019, p. 175). It is here that the distinction between merely knowing and actively responding to another's inner life becomes important. Stanley Cavell (1979) formulates this as the difference between knowledge and acknowledgment. For him, the problem of other minds is not fundamentally epistemological but ethical. The sceptic's demand for certainty about another's inner life expresses not a lack of knowledge but a refusal to acknowledge the other as a subject whose claims upon us do not depend on epistemic verification. In his essay "Between Acknowledgment and Avoidance," Cavell draws this distinction as follows:

> Acknowledgment "goes beyond" knowledge, not in the order, or as a feat, of cognition, but in the call upon me to express the knowledge at its core, to recognize what I know, to do something in the light of it, apart from which this knowledge remains without expression, hence perhaps without possession. (p. 428)

This highlights the ethical considerations inherent in our quest to comprehend other minds. The opacity of another's intentional life — veiled between experience and its expression — does not suspend this demand for response. The novel illustrates this not only through Parry, who may be dismissed as insane, but also through Joe's wife Clarissa. Rather than adhering to the conventional structure of a couple threatened by an external intruder, *Enduring Love* stages the simultaneous unravelling of Joe and Clarissa's marriage. Under these ethical pressures, Joe's persistent focus on "information, foresight and careful calculation" (McEwan, 2006, p. 150) may be read as an attempt to avoid the vulnerability that relational acknowledgment entails. This helps account not only for his reduction of Parry's motives to a "biological calculus" (Greenberg, 2007, p. 102), but also for his growing estrangement from Clarissa, whose demand for acknowledgment remains unmet.

Clarissa's role in the novel becomes important as a counterpoint to Joe's rationalistic method. As Phelan (2009) observes, regarding Parry, Joe and Clarissa display "simultaneously plausible and incompatible understandings" (p. 317). Their disagreement is therefore not simply interpretive but aspectual, grounded in distinct modes under which Parry's intentional states are apprehended. Consequently, as the situation escalates, Joe fails to open up to Clarissa, resulting in "the breakdown in communication […] as the direct result of their inability to

understand each other's minds" (Green, 2011, p. 450). At major hinge-points in the novel, Joe is either unable to or does not intend to share his thoughts and plans with Clarissa (McEwan, 2006, pp. 37, 46–53, 79), resulting in Clarissa moving further away from Joe's interior world. Palmer (2009) rightly points out that Joe and Clarissa formed a "fairly well-functioning intramental unit" at the beginning of the novel ("Attributions", p. 299). But as Clarissa accuses in her letter, "as the Parry thing grew I watched you go deeper into yourself and further and further away from me. You were manic, and driven, and very lonely. You were on a case, a mission… in the process you forgot to take me along with you, you forgot how to confide" (McEwan, 2006, p. 217).

Clarissa's accusations resonate with precision, and are corroborated by Joe's own admissions earlier in the novel. That the gnawing sense of being on his own eats at him becomes evident in two metaphors wherein he likens himself to a "mental patient" (p. 58) who does not want to be left alone with his mind, and with a "man who has seen no other human for a year" (p. 81). This growing sense of isolation becomes absolute and irreversible when, at the end of Chapter 18, he exclaims: "Clarissa thought I was mad, the police thought I was a fool, and one thing was clear: the task […] was going to be mine alone" (p. 161). At one point in the novel, Joe accuses Parry of being "inviolable in his solipsism" (p. 144) and therefore difficult to negotiate or decipher. Ironically, by retreating into his own mind, Joe engenders a similarly intense sense of exclusion in Clarissa. Her intimate knowledge of Joe as her husband does not mitigate this exclusion. Cavell (1979) highlights this precise condition: "I can know, for example, all there is to know about Garbo, even know her personally, perhaps as her constant companion from whom she has no secrets, and still be excluded from her, not share her (inner) life" (p. 331). The barrier here is not informational but participatory, and therefore cannot be overcome through knowledge-gathering alone.

Clarissa's exclusion from Joe's pursuit also means that her suggestion of interpersonal engagement goes unheeded. In her final letter, she reminds Joe of her earlier suggestion that "we ask him in and talk to him" (McEwan, 2006, p. 218). She also expresses her certainty that "at that time Parry didn't know that one day he would want you dead. Together we might have deflected him from the course he took" (p. 218). This course of action is also explicitly suggested midway through the narrative when Inspector Linley asks Joe, "have you and your wife considered asking him in for a cup of tea and a chat?" (p. 157).

Significantly, at several points in the narrative, Joe comes within touching distance of recognising Parry's distress as something that calls for response. During their first encounter right after the balloon accident, his initial thoughts looking at Parry's "wretched" expression are: "this man is in shock. He wants me to help him" (pp. 19–20). It is probably this desire to help another human being that precludes Joe from moving out of the scene straightaway. This capacity for ethical responsiveness is again highlighted in the apparently insignificant scene of him kneeling down and putting back a bunch of marigolds in a water-filled jam jar that was lying on the road and then keeping it in a safe place to protect the flowers from further harm (p. 44). Later, when on his visit to John Logan's widow she asks him to call each of the four other people present at the scene and search for the identity of the 'mysterious woman', Joe cannot put down her request, realising that he "would be in a position to censor the information and perhaps save the family some misery" (p. 121). There are several moments in Joe's subsequent interactions with Parry where such flashes of relational attunement are displayed. Joe's politeness, for example, in refusing to pray on Parry's request is born out of his desire "not to offend a true believer" (p. 25). His sympathy is evident when he considers Parry's demeanour as a "sorry sight" (p. 61) and as a result he speaks with him "with a little kindness" (p. 61) and later in the novel, amidst Parry's emotional outbursts, feels "almost sorry for him again" (p. 91). There is even a flash of empathy when, at one point, Joe looks in the mirror and wonders what it would be like to be obsessed by someone like himself (p. 73). However, these moments in which Joe is addressed not as an observer attempting prediction, but as a participant

called upon to respond, remain mere interruptions in his rational investigative stance, never really drawing him towards meaningful engagement.

Joe's narrative ends by inflicting procedural containment on Parry, instead of acknowledging him as a suffering subject. This is reflected in his appeal to the police and also his strict classification of Parry's pathology in clinical terms (substantiated further by the case study in the appendix). Two metaphors Joe uses to describe Parry are worth our attention. One, where Parry is "like a dog tied up outside a shop" (p. 77), and another where he is likened to "a forlorn zoo bird" (p. 91). Both metaphors function to contain, classify, and render him manageable instead of engaging with him as a subject. The possibility of such an engagement with Parry is briefly entertained by Joe, but ultimately rejected, as the prospect of further interaction appears to him less as an opportunity for understanding than as an interpretive entanglement: "I wondered too if it might be to my advantage to hear him out again, and discover more about his state of mind. But the prospect of being drawn in again to another domestic drama […] appalled me" (p. 71). It is only too late that he learns that "Pitiless objectivity […] was always a doomed social strategy" (p. 180). This retrospective recognition testifies that a rational pursuit of forensic knowledge, divorced from meaningful dialogue and ethical engagement, is not sufficient to sustain relational life, in spite of predictive success. In Cavell's (1979) words, "the problem of the other was always known […] not to be a problem of knowledge, or rather to result not from a disappointment over a failure of knowledge but from a disappointment over its success" (p. 476).

3. Conclusion

What *Enduring Love* ultimately reveals is not the inadequacy of a rational approach to the human mind as such, but the ethical insufficiency of a stance that treats predictive knowledge as the final condition of relational security. Joe's application of what may retrospectively be described as a Dennettian intentional stance towards Parry is, in functional terms, strikingly successful. His predictions regarding Parry's behaviour are largely borne out by subsequent events. Yet this predictive accuracy coexists with an increasing experiential distance from both Parry and Clarissa. The novel thus stages a paradox wherein the interpretive framework that allows Joe to anticipate Parry's actions with growing precision simultaneously forecloses the possibility of engaging with him as a subject whose distress might call for response rather than mere clinical diagnosis.

This disjunction between prediction and participation becomes even more pronounced in Joe's relationship with Clarissa. Her repeated attempts to initiate dialogue — whether by suggesting that they speak to Parry directly or by urging Joe to confide in her — point toward an alternative mode of response grounded not in behavioural anticipation but in interpersonal acknowledgment. That these suggestions remain unheeded underscores the extent to which Joe's interpretive posture is governed by a desire for informational control rather than relational engagement. In Cavellian terms, what is at stake here is not Joe's failure to know, but his reluctance to act upon that knowledge.

Importantly, the novel extends this epistemic predicament beyond the diegetic level to implicate the reader as well. Deprived of direct access to Parry's intentional states, and compelled to rely on Joe's increasingly unstable narration, the reader is likewise drawn into a posture of interpretive conjecture, attributing beliefs and desires in order to make sense of unfolding events. In doing so, the reader adopts toward Joe precisely the same stance that Joe adopts toward Parry: one that privileges predictive coherence over participatory understanding.

In McEwan's later novel *Atonement*, the narrator points out that "it wasn't only wickedness and scheming that made people unhappy, it was confusion and misunderstanding; above all, it was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you" (McEwan, 2001/2007, p. 38). *Enduring Love* dramatises a similar scenario, adding to it a further ethical

dimension. The tragedy that unfolds in the wake of the balloon accident is not merely a result of misjudgement or delusion, but of a sustained refusal to engage with another consciousness except through the mediating lens of explanatory models. In this sense, the novel invites us to reconsider whether the pursuit of epistemic certainty in matters of intentionality might itself function as a means of avoiding the ethical demands that acknowledgment of another's inner life entails.

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