

In defence of moral objectivity

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy

of

Rhodes University

By

Eusebius McKaiser

December 2002

Abstract

This thesis examines the problem of moral objectivity, which is constituted by the ontological, epistemological and motivational challenges. It gradually develops an account of moral objectivity that has the dual function of dealing with the enemies of moral objectivity as well as giving a positive account of what moral objectivity is. It establishes these aims by arguing for the following theses.

The first set of arguments show that relativist theories of ethics provide us with no forceful grounds for being sceptical about moral objectivity.

The second set of arguments deepens the response to those who are sceptical about moral objectivity. It does so by showing in greater detail how rationality plays a substantive role in our practical deliberation, our notion of agency as well as our reactive attitudes. These arguments provide further reasons why we should have faith in the possibility of developing an adequate account of moral objectivity.

The last set of arguments provides the positive account of moral objectivity. This positive account ends with the discussion of a paradigmatic moral fact that gives full expression to the features of moral objectivity that have been articulated and defended.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Marius Vermaak, for the countless hours that he has spent in helping me to improve my philosophical skill in all respects. He is the best teacher in philosophy that I have known.

Many thanks must also go to all of my colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at Rhodes University. Few can dispute that this is one of the best corners of the world to eat, sleep and drink philosophy. A large number of my philosophical convictions have been refined in response to many generous discussions by all of my colleagues.

I acknowledge the financial support of the National Research Foundation – the views expressed in this thesis are not necessarily theirs.

I must thank my family and friends for their continuous support and encouragement. Thokozile Madonko has been particularly generous in lending a political philosopher's ear whilst enduring my many hours of typing away on her office computer.

My deepest thanks to Veli Mitova whose meticulous editing of an earlier draft of this thesis has deepened its analysis beyond recognition. Her commentary over many a beer at the Rat has been very useful. Mistakes that remain are entirely due to me.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction	1
--------------	---

Chapter 2

Conventionalism	6
Subjectivism	11
Revisiting the ontological, epistemological and motivational requirements	13
Ethical disagreement and the rationality of moral discourse	15
Can we measure ethical disagreement	21
Emotivism and the rationality of moral discourse	24
Lessons from the philosophy of belief	26
On Moral Progress	27

Chapter 3

The phenomenology of practical deliberation	31
The role of reason in practical deliberation	37
The “So what” response	45
Nagel’s response	47

Chapter 4

Weak objectivity	61
Secondary-property realism	64
Strong moral realism	72
An example of a moral fact: Gewirth’s Principle of Generic Consistency	74

Coda: Opening the Closet	79
---------------------------------	----

Bibliography	81
---------------------	----

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ethics, the philosophical study of the good and the right, comprises meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Meta-ethics is about the nature and status of moral claims and values. Michael Smith (1994: 2) states this succinctly as follows:

In meta-ethics we are concerned not with questions which are the province of normative ethics like 'Should I give to famine relief?' or 'Should I return the wallet in the street?' but rather with questions about questions like these ... what sort of fact is a moral fact? In what sense is moral argument simply a species of rational argument? ... What is the standard against which a good moral argument is to be measured?

Ethics has traditionally centred on the question, 'what ought I to do?' We are guided by morality in what we do, how we live and what kind of persons we are. Religious moral systems, social customs and normative theories offer a vast array of norms, principles, rules, values, examples and ideals. Are these moral claims and prescriptions objective? In other words, can answers to the question of what one ought to do be offered that are not context (e.g. cultural or religious) dependent but based on universal and impartial moral reasoning? This question is of significance in all spheres of life. Public policy debates, for example, presuppose an understanding of what the correct moral principles and rules are that should guide debate on such pressing issues as abortion, prostitution, death penalty, obligations toward the poor and debt relief for poor countries.

Relativism denies that objective answers to these normative moral questions are available to us as moral agents. I distinguish two sources of relativism. The first is the desire to be tolerant. This is a function of political and social developments during the latter half of the last century. A key result of World War II has been the protection and promotion of the rights to self-determination of both individuals and communities. This is particularly instantiated in the model of liberal democracies. These developments have contributed, in part, to the continuing scepticism about an objective response to the question of what one ought to do. On this view, individuals and communities are best placed to determine what moral principles and rules should guide their lifestyle choices, public policy and ethical debates. I recognise the central pragmatic value of relativism as an attempt at fostering respect for those with different conceptions of the good from one's own. My thesis does not challenge this source of relativism.

The second source of relativism is a series of philosophical objections. These include the ontological objection, the epistemological objection and the motivation objection, which constitute the problem of moral objectivity.

The ontological problem: do 'moral facts' really exist? In our ordinary interaction with the world we become aware of such objects as tables and chairs. But we do not come across moral facts. When we observe someone being murdered we may observe various objects such as a knife, a body and a wound. But we do not observe 'evil' or 'wrongness'. The challenge for the moral objectivist is to provide an account of moral facts that can make sense of this mysteriousness about the ontological nature of such moral facts.

The epistemological problem: Mathematical facts are established through proofs. Ordinary perceptual beliefs are shown to be true through our usual perceptual awareness of the world. Scientists prove scientific facts through observation and experimentation. It is not clear, however, how moral facts could be apprehended. How could we become aware of moral facts? The moral objectivist has to make explicit the perceptual or other cognitive apparatus that we could use to discern moral facts.

The motivation challenge: there is an internal connection between moral beliefs and motivation which explains why we act on the basis of those moral beliefs. However, such a connection is grounded in the Humean insight that our actions are based on our passions. The objectivist claims that there are moral facts which hold true regardless of the contingent desires of the moral agent. This seems to sever the connection between moral belief and motivation. The moral objectivist has to show how it is possible to be motivated to act on the basis of moral facts.

This thesis develops an overall account of moral objectivity that shows how the moral objectivist is in fact able to deal with these challenges. Chapter 2 gives an exposition of ethical relativism. Relativist theories share a rejection of the claim that there are moral facts. This scepticism has both ontological and epistemological sources. In showing why relativism should be rejected, the moral objectivist is able to provide a (negative) defence of moral objectivity. Chapter 2, therefore, provides an exposition of relativism by giving a detailed exposition of the two main types of relativism – conventionalism and subjectivism. These

theories are based on the diversity of moral outlooks as well as an examination of moral language. They thus provide both empirical as well as conceptual grounds for denying the claim that there are moral facts. The response that chapter 2 develops to relativism does not provide a complete positive account of moral objectivity. However, in showing what is wrong with relativism it does argue for a number of conclusions which provide an important initial exposition of the features of moral objectivity. First, I show that ethical disagreement is genuine and can be measured in terms of the conceptual gap that exists between disputants. This measurement is based on my contention, following Richardson, that we can make sense of partial conceptual incommensurability (although not total conceptual incommensurability). Such partial conceptual incommensurability allows for the delineation of features of conceptual schemes that constitute deep disagreement, even though those conceptual schemes are not totally conceptually incommensurate. Furthermore, rational discourse is a pivotal element of settling such deep disagreement. These contentions are important negative responses to relativism. If relativism is correct, then we have to either deny that ethical disagreement occurs or, should we accept that such disagreement does occur, we have to restrict the role of rational discourse in the settling of such disagreement. It follows that relativism should be rejected because it erroneously forces us to accept one of these equally untenable alternatives. Chapter 2 does not establish that morality is objective. It does establish that relativism provides an inadequate basis for being sceptical about the possibility of there being moral facts.

Chapter 3 examines the motivation challenge in greater detail. It looks at the issue of what it means to be motivated by moral facts, if indeed there are such facts. The classic source of this challenge is Humean psychology. In terms of Humean psychology, our practical deliberation is fundamentally an expression of our wants and desires. Our actions express those desires that are strongest. If this is the case, then the moral objectivist needs to show how it is possible to be motivated by the moral facts. If we cannot be motivated to perform those actions that track the moral facts¹, then it is not clear how we could hold moral agents responsible for those actions which fall short of meeting the normative requirements that are set by the moral facts. The chapter provides a detailed response to the motivation challenge. I show why the problem should be taken seriously by the moral objectivist, rather than be

¹ I first encountered the notion of 'tracking the truth' in Mark Leon's "Responsible Believers" where he uses the phrase to refer to those beliefs of a doxastic agent that co-incide with the best available evidence. I use to the notion in the realm of moral action to refer to those actions that co-incide with the moral facts.

dismissed as irrelevant to the central contentions of moral objectivity. More importantly, I argue that a Humean conception of the self is wrong. A noumenal conception of the self is best able to account for our phenomenology of practical deliberation. Once one accepts a noumenal conception of the self, then one is in a position to make sense of how moral facts do have the requisite motivational force. The central claim is that rationality plays a pivotal role in practical deliberation and, furthermore, that the moral agent has the capacity to control this process. We can thus be motivated to perform an act that tracks the moral facts, should we exercise rational deliberation. It follows that the motivation challenge is defused and that the moral objectivist can develop an account of moral responsibility in tandem with her account of moral objectivity. Chapter 3, too, is therefore not a positive exposition of moral objectivity but an important response to the motivation challenge that partly generated the problem of moral objectivity.

Chapter 4 gives a positive exposition of the claim that there are moral facts. I provide a synthesis of weak objectivity (the claim that there are universal moral truths) and moral realism. A moral fact has three essential features. These are that (a) moral facts are universal moral truths and vice versa; (b) moral facts are properties of objects/actions that have the power to cause certain responses in moral agents and (c) the properties that enable objects/actions to have the disposition to cause these responses in moral agent are real properties in the sense that they persist whether or not they are being intuited by moral agents. This systematic positive characterisation of moral facts allows me to show how moral objectivists can meet the ontological, epistemological and motivational challenges. I argue that the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) as developed by Gewirth provides an excellent example of a moral fact.

Chapter 2

On Relativism

Introduction

Ethical relativism denies that there are or can be moral facts². If we believe that there are moral facts, then we need to show why and how ethical relativism is flawed. I distinguish very carefully between the two main types of ethical relativism: conventionalism and subjectivism. This distinction provides a general survey of the landscape of relativist accounts of ethics. I discuss two versions of subjectivism - simple subjectivism and emotivism. I show that emotivism, as a complex ethical theory that analyses the nature of ethical language, is best able to meet the challenges usually levelled at relativism. In the final analysis, however, I raise a series of objections that undermine all relativist theories. I argue in particular that no version of relativism is able to account for the undeniable rationality of ethics.

Sections 1 and 2 develop the logic of relativism by giving a detailed exposition of the arguments in support of conventionalism and subjectivism. I draw on Harman in providing an exposition of how the diversity in moral outlooks is used by conventionalist as a source of denying moral objectivity. My exposition of subjectivism distinguishes between simple subjectivism and emotivism, illustrating how the latter theory developed as a response to the weaknesses of the former. Section 3 briefly shows how relativists might be able to respond to the ontological, epistemological and motivational problems that constitute the problem of moral objectivity. Sections 4, 5 and 6 develop critical responses to the positive exposition of relativism. Section 4 examines the issue of ethical disagreement and the role of rationality in moral discourse. It is my contention that conventionalism and simple subjectivism wrongly claim that there is no ethical disagreement. They claim that ethical disagreement is mere illusion. While emotivism does concede that there is ethical disagreement, it is unable to provide a normative role for rationality in moral discourse. I end the chapter by briefly

² I conflate (and take this to be a good move in this context) universal moral truths with moral facts. In chapter 4 I argue that 'moral facts' do not commit objectivists to a queer ontology. A moral fact is constitutive of a universal moral truth. Once we realise this to be the case the temptation to ascribe a queer ontology to moral realism falls away.

showing how the concept of 'moral progress' provides a further *reductio* against relativism. If relativism is true, then we should be unable to make sense of moral progress.

Section 1: Conventionalism

Relativist accounts of ethics share a rejection of the claim that there are (or could be)³ moral facts. Such accounts function at two levels. The first is called conventionalism and functions at the level of culture or community. The second is called subjectivism and functions at the level of the individual. The source of ethical authority for conventionalism is nothing but the rules and traditions of a group. On this view, the moral judgments that we make are mere reports of the moral attitudes of our society. For a subjectivist, the source of ethical authority is the choices of an individual. On this view, the moral judgments that we make are mere reports of our individual moral attitudes. In this section I discuss conventionalism. Conventionalism is premised on the Diversity Thesis. This thesis states that from the fact that diverse conventions are correlated to different groups it follows that there are no moral facts. The diversity of various cultural groups bring to light different, often incompatible, moral codes. These differences appear not just among different simple societies but also between various groups within more complex societies. Classic examples include differential treatment of the dead as well as differing attitudes toward infanticide. Some societies bury the dead while others cremate them. Some societies practise infanticide while others find the practise abhorrent. Conventionalists' scepticism about moral facts is based on an argument about what conclusions we can draw from such cases of moral divergence which do not appear to be susceptible to objective analysis. Gilbert Harman (1996: 3-19) provides a detailed statement of the logic of the conventionalist position. He offers a general argument for relativism that can be amended slightly with reference to the distinction between conventionalism and subjectivism. He argues that moral relativism should be not be conflated with moral absolutism nor with moral nihilism. He defines moral relativism as follows:

There is no single true morality. There are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others (1996: 5).

³ I include the option that relativists may deny that there 'could be' moral facts for the following reason. It is plausible that a weak version of relativism may well hold that even if there were moral facts, the contingent influence of one's cultural background will make it impossible for us to know whether a particular moral principle is a moral fact *per se* or merely a principle that reflects the rules and customs of one's culture. This version of relativism restricts its skepticism to an epistemological claim. In this thesis I consider the stronger view that there are, in fact, no moral facts. This widens the skepticism to include both epistemological and ontological objections.

He adds:

Relative moral judgments can continue to play a serious role in moral thinking (1996: 6).

Moral absolutism holds that there is a single true morality while moral nihilism concludes from the fact that there is no single true morality that morality – making moral judgments – should be rejected altogether. It is precisely in order to distinguish relativism from moral nihilism that Harman adds that relativists take the role of moral judgments in moral thinking seriously. He starts by listing examples of beliefs and practices (e.g. slavery, infanticide and the status of women) that show a divergence in the moral framework of different cultures. There appears to be no nontrivial universally accepted moral principles. Harman recognizes that it does not *logically* follow from the fact of diversity that moral absolutism is false or that relativism is true. He thinks that a conclusion can only be drawn by asking what *the most plausible explanation* of moral diversity is. He proceeds as follows. The pervasiveness of moral disagreement, even after extensive discussion and debate, suggests that moral disagreement rests on basic differences in moral outlook. It does not appear to be the case that, say, differences in moral outlook are the result of differences in situation⁴ – deep disagreement exists even within the same family in the same culture. An absolutist explanation of these differences might be that some people are ill placed to ascertain the truth of the matter. Relativists, on the other hand, explain these differences by claiming that what is right and wrong depends on a particular system of moral co-ordinates. These moral co-ordinates consist in various values such as the principles and standards that constitutes one's moral outlook. The illusion of moral absolutism can be explained as the misidentification of one's own values with moral facts. One can therefore conclude that moral judgments express

⁴ James Rachels in *The elements of moral philosophy* (pp 25 – 26) argues, for example, that divergent attitudes towards such practices as infanticide mask the fact that geographical factors have resulted in different interpretations of the same underlying moral principles. Those who practise infanticide often live in harsh weather conditions and tend to be nomadic. They practise infanticide in order to preserve the tribe who would otherwise not be able to care for all of its members and so risk extinction. It is for this same reason that other groups in more favourable and nonnomadic conditions do *not* practise infanticide. Doing so is not pivotal to their survival.

evaluative relativity, the latter referring to the differing systems of moral co-ordinates⁵, which lend themselves to divergent moral beliefs and practices⁶.

In appreciating these differences, grounded in incompatible conceptual schemes, it is important to note how deeply rooted the diversity is as far as conventionalism is concerned. These different groups are (a) deeply convinced about the correctness of their moral codes and (b) this conviction is linked to their different lifestyles. In other words, conventionalism does not just derive its force from the fact of diverse moral beliefs and practices. It is reinforced by the fact that it explains these entrenched differences as having an internal connection between the moral outlook and the lifestyle of these groups. This enables conventionalism to *account* for the different moral beliefs and practices - they are grounded not in reason but in the lived experiences of various societies. Moral convictions are based on nothing but these lived experiences. At the same time it is these lived experiences that give moral agents their internal convictions about the correctness of their particular moral beliefs and practices. The strong conclusion to draw from the Diversity Thesis is that there are no moral facts. This is the conclusion that such philosophers as Harman try to defend. While relativism is not logically established it is put forward as the best explanation for the diversity in moral outlooks among different cultural groups. The weaker conclusion is that even if there were moral facts, we are not likely to discover them. We can never be certain that our moral convictions are not *merely* the expression of the cultural structures within which such convictions are developed, precisely because of the effect that lifestyles have on persuading us of the correctness of our particular moral beliefs and practices. So it would follow that we could never say with certainty that we have discerned a moral fact. This weaker conclusion is an epistemological one that has force whether or not there are moral facts. The stronger conclusion makes a claim about whether there are indeed moral facts. The rest of this chapter is a response to the stronger conclusion. In chapter 4 I show how the epistemological worry can be defused.

⁵ Harman shows in "Explaining Value" how we can understand these moral co-ordinates through greater interdisciplinary discourse with other social sciences such as sociobiology and social psychology rather than focusing on normative questions about ethics.

⁶ The distinction that I have drawn between conventionalism and subjectivism is compatible with Harman's statement of the general relativist position. Conventionalism claims that the sources of one's moral co-ordinates are the rules and traditions of one's culture. Subjectivism claims that the source of one's moral co-ordinates is the choices of the individual. My discussion of Harman's argument for the rest of this section presupposes conventionalism but could be transferred to subjectivism with relative ease.

An initial observation about the *logic* of the diversity theory needs to be stated. The key mistake is the claim that disagreement implies – whether logically or as an inference to the best explanation – that there are no moral facts. But this cannot be the case. While some persons may believe that the earth is flat and others that it is round, it would be false to infer that there is no fact of the matter. Ethics is possibly a more difficult terrain but the logical point remains – disagreement on a moral issue is insufficient to show that there is no moral fact about the issue. This obviously requires some sketch of the positive doctrine of what a moral fact is, especially in light of the ontological, epistemic and motivational objections. (I do so in Chapter 4).

Michael Smith (1994) further undermines the weight attached to the Diversity Thesis by noting that there is also widespread agreement on ethical issues. He cites examples of naturalistic concepts that have positive and negative evaluative aspects built into them – examples include our concepts of brutality, honesty, loyalty, meanness and cowardliness. These naturalistic concepts also appear to hold universally. It is not the case, as was contended by Harman, that there are no nontrivial universally accepted moral principles. Moral attitudes about such concepts as ‘brutality’ do seem to invoke universal disapprobation. The relativistic focus on classic examples of differing moral practices is merely selective. The salient point is that the prevalence of agreement or disagreement (e.g. on abortion, the status of women, treatment of the dead and infanticide) does not allow one to draw conclusions about the existence or non-existence of moral facts.

Sturgeon (1994: 106 – 107) argues that Harman’s argument collapses into moral nihilism. He notes three parts to Harman’s position. First, Harman concedes that moral nihilism *appears* to follow from the intractability of moral debates. This looming nihilism calls for some reason for accepting relativism over nihilism. Second, moral relativism can be made true if we understand our moral judgments to mean something like being standard-relative. This is what Harman means when he states that our moral judgments reflect an evaluative relativity. Third, some argument then needs to be provided to show why this fallback on the relativist interpretation of our moral language is preferable to moral nihilism. Sturgeon finds a decisive weakness at this point in Harman’s argument. He claims that Harman argues for conventionalism by showing how one is led from endorsing moral nihilism to endorsing conventionalism. This transition from moral nihilism to conventionalism draws on recent developments in discussions on reference by such philosophers as Putnam, which establishes

externalist theories of meaning. Their work suggests that the meaning of words and concepts are in part determined by factors outside the head of the person making the utterance. The truth value of claims that I make about the world is determined by a combination of the way the world is as well as the meaning assigned to terms by the linguistic community of which I am a part⁷. Sturgeon suggests that Harman offers a similar treatment of moral concepts. He suggests that rather than rejecting morality altogether, we should become aware of the evaluative relativity that preserves the structures of our moral beliefs. The externalist factors in ethics that determine the evaluative relativity would include the various beliefs and practices of the moral community of which I am a part. So it follows that instead of rejecting morality altogether we should rather make sense of the moral concepts that we use by making reference to certain factors outside our heads – the rules and customs of our moral community that determine the meaning of those moral concepts.

Sturgeon correctly shows that the problem with Harman's attempt at showing how we can make a transition from an *initial* moral nihilist position to one of moral relativity is that he does not fully analyse what that initial moral nihilism entails. Nihilism does not just imply that no truth conditions could be assigned to my moral judgments but *also* that the standards that I wanted to adopt in my initial assigning of those truth-values must have been non-existent. The transition to the relativist position therefore does not follow since this would undo (without justification) the initial abandonment of all evaluative standards. It follows that Harman fails to show why moral relativism can avoid a collapse into moral nihilism. At best, I would suggest, we could understand Harman's argument as a *direct* argument for conventionalism and not as one that establishes conventionalism obliquely as a transition from moral nihilism. However, this interpretation leaves unexplained why one should not be so skeptical about morality as to endorse moral nihilism. Harman's intuition is that relativists do not want to deny the serious role that moral judgments continue to play in our moral thinking. But this amounts to stipulating a practical attraction about relativism and so cannot suffice as an argument for the rejection of nihilism. The nihilist could merely respond that we should take seriously the wrongness of our convictions about the status of moral judgments even if this seems deeply counter intuitive. It seems that Harman is unable to show why relativists should not be moral nihilists.

⁷ The complete exposition of this argument can be found in Putnam's "The meaning of 'meaning'".

Section 2: Subjectivism.

Relativism does not primarily analyse moral practices at the level of society, as does conventionalist accounts of ethics. Subjectivism analyses moral convictions at the level of the individual. The key unit of analysis for the subjectivist is that of the individual as opposed to society. Subjectivism is concerned with moral language and in particular the status of moral claims such as 'abortion is wrong'. I differentiate between simple subjectivism and emotivism. Emotivism is developed in response to the flaws of simple subjectivism. While both theories try to analyse our moral language, simple subjectivism is unable to make sense of moral disagreement. Emotivism develops as a response to this flaw by providing a more sophisticated account of the nature of moral language. This allows emotivism to avoid the charge of not being able to make sense of moral disagreement. I argue, however, that the decisive *reductio* against emotivism is the general problem with all accounts of relativism, that of not being able to account for the apparent rationality of ethics.

Simple subjectivism claims that ethical statements merely report facts about the attitudes that individuals have toward a particular ethical issue. So, for example, when Sipho says that abortion is morally acceptable, he is reporting the fact that he disapproves of abortion. He is stating a fact about his attitude. Simple subjectivism and conventionalism are analogous in an important respect. The conventionalist claims that Sipho is reporting a fact about the attitude of his society towards abortion. Simple subjectivism claims that Sipho is reporting a fact about his individual, subjective attitude towards abortion. If simple subjectivism is right, however, then I am merely reporting my attitude when I declare that abortion is wrong and you are merely reporting your attitude when you say that abortion is right. There is no disagreement as such. Consider two people who express contradictory opinions on abortion. Assume, also, that there is no deep disagreement between the two. In other words, they share the same conceptual scheme; they do not have strikingly contrasting evaluative systems for approaching such issues. It is merely the case that Sipho says 'abortion is wrong' and Thandi says that 'abortion is right'. There is no disagreement between them.

Emotivists develop simple subjectivism as a theory about moral language but tries to account for moral disagreement. Copi and Cohen (1998: 109 – 112) explain the difference between disagreement in *belief* and disagreement in *attitude* which is crucial to understanding emotivism. When two persons disagree in belief, they are disagreeing about the fact(s) of a

matter. Such disagreement can usually be settled by establishing the facts in various ways such as scientific enquiry. Disagreement in attitude, on the other hand, refers to differences in feelings towards some matter of fact. Such disagreement is usually settled by using such techniques as rhetoric and persuasion to bring about the desired change in the will, attitude or actions of the other person. Moral concepts such as 'good', 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' are expressions of approval and disapproval and result in disagreement in attitude. Unlike such philosophers as Stevenson from whence they draw this distinction, Copi and Cohen are neutral on the pressing question of whether or not this noncognitive function of moral concepts excludes a cognitive (e.g. objective) function. Emotivists, however, restrict the function of moral language to the expression of one's moral attitudes. This analysis allows emotivists to give ethical statements a function that is general to language usage, that of persuasion. In other words, when I express my ethical convictions I am attempting to persuade others to change their attitudes such that they coincide with mine.

Stevenson (1994: 79 – 82) argues that ethical language serves as a social instrument for bringing about changes in the attitudes of people. This function is served not through rational discourse but by employing whatever means is effective in bringing about the desired change in the other's attitude. The emotive force of language is what enables one to fulfil this function e.g. through persuasive speech. So, when Sipho expresses his attitude on abortion, he is attempting to bring about a change in Thandi's attitude towards the issue. This makes it possible for emotivists to give an account for ethical disagreement. Stevenson (1994: 79) states that the reason why previous subjectivist theories could not account for moral disagreement is because they viewed moral language as wholly descriptive. Once one recognises that ethical disagreement is disagreement in attitude, then this worry falls away. Emotivists are therefore able to agree that ethical disagreement happens but will disagree with objectivists about the nature of such disagreement and whether or not it can be settled through rational discourse. Emotivists understand ethical disagreements as disagreements *in* attitude rather than *about* attitudes. This means that two contradictory ethical statements express impossible desires. One person desires the acceptance of abortion while another person does not. Both desires cannot be fulfilled at the same time. *That* is the locus of disagreement. It is because the simple subjectivist conceives of ethical statements as factual reports about individual attitudes that they are unable to account for ethical disagreement. If we can merely report on the attitudes of different moral agents, then there is no room for disagreement. One can merely give a factual report about what the respective moral claims being made are. One

can falsely report that one has a certain attitude, for example by making insincere statements. But there is no disagreement between our *actual* moral beliefs. Emotivism is superior to simple subjectivism as it is able to make sense of cases of genuine moral disagreement.

A proper understanding of such cases, however, reveals to us that ethical disagreement is intractable because it is disagreement in attitude. Emotivists are therefore able to undercut the objectivist claim that ethical disagreement can be settled (rationally), without endorsing the unattractive and implausible simple subjectivist claim that ethical disagreement is mere illusion. This gives a richer analysis of our moral language than simple subjectivism whilst keeping our intuitions about ethical disagreement intact.

Section 3: Revisiting the ontological, epistemological and motivational challenges⁸

Relativism can avoid the ontological problem and explain why there might appear to be moral facts. By denying the existence of moral facts, relativists can avoid the need to provide an account of the ontology of such facts. The ontological problem is thus sidestepped. While all relativism avoids the ontological problem, only emotivism has the explanatory power to account for the illusion that there are moral facts. Our intuition that moral facts exist stems from the nature of language. Ordinary statements like 'It is raining' or 'This is a student' are statements of fact. They are linguistic expressions which derive their truth from the way the world appears to us. They piggyback on correspondence theories of truth and metaphysical realism. We typically expect most of our statements in everyday discourse to have a truth status. It is therefore unsurprising that we expect ethical statements that form a significant part of our everyday discourse to also have a veridical component. The illusion that moral facts exist is thus a function of language.

Relativism also avoids the epistemological problem. Objectivists have to make sense of how we could apprehend moral facts and know that we have apprehended them. They might make reference to some rational faculty, for example. But they have to provide a complete account of the process that allows us to know that we have discerned a moral fact. Since relativists deny the existence of moral facts, they need not account for the apprehension of such facts.

⁸ The Introductory chapter to this thesis gives a detailed exposition of what the ontological, epistemic and motivational challenges are.

Some relativists do not deny that we make moral judgments and that these judgments play a serious role in our moral thinking. But no special faculty is needed to grasp these moral principles. Emotivists, for example, by simply understanding moral claims as expressions of one's attitude can understand moral judgments as contingent desires that we have with respect to a particular moral issue. Since emotions are not mysterious, emotivists can understand moral judgments as a species of them.

Finally, *some* relativists can easily respond to the motivational challenge. Conventionalism is not able to respond to the motivational challenge⁹. The puzzle about how moral facts can motivate me is not particular to moral objectivity. It is just as puzzling how a society's norms can motivate me, unless we say that these norms induce (or brainwashes one into having) desires. In this case (i) conventionalism collapses into some kind of emotivism, which means that perhaps it is not that bad, after all; or (ii) we must accept that societal norms *just do* induce desires.

There are two problems that follow from accepting (i). First, conventionalism would still fall foul of the arguments that I level against emotivism below. Second, it would be difficult to sustain the claim that conventionalism is really a species of conventionalism. I have already noted that conventionalism, unlike emotivism, denies that ethical disagreement occurs. It is therefore suspect to suggest that we could recast conventionalism as a species of emotivism. At any rate, there are decisive problems internal to conventionalism that has already been shown to provide good grounds for dismissing it.

There is one serious problem that follows from accepting (ii). If we accept (ii), it becomes difficult to sustain the motivational challenge without undercutting relativism also. After all, the objectivist could then simply claim that moral facts *just do* induce desires. One response might be that we can make sense of how societal norms induce desires. When one is raised in a community, the rules and customs of that community gradually shape the desires that one has. Moral facts, on the other hand, are impersonal and so it becomes difficult to see how they could induce desires. But this response is inadequate. The relativist still faces a difficulty in those cases where there is a tension between what the moral agent wants to do and what societal norms suggests that she does. It is not clear how societal norms shape the agent's

⁹ I am indebted to Veli Mitova for insightful commentary on this point.

desire in those cases. While this does not provide a direct response to the motivation challenge, it does show that the challenge is not necessarily specific to moral objectivity but may well be a nuisance for relativists also. In chapter 3 I argue that the motivational challenge should be taken seriously for various reasons. It is therefore inadequate to sidestep the challenge by showing it to be applicable not just to one's own account of ethics.

Emotivism, however, offers an adequate response to the motivational challenge by postulating an internal connection between motivation and moral belief. To have a moral belief is to have a certain sort of attitude. Siphos belief that abortion is wrong expresses an attitude of disapprobation. But our attitudes also predispose us to act in certain ways. We are moved to perform actions that accord with positive attitudes that we have and to refrain from action that reflects a disapproving attitude that we might have. Consider Siphos who holds a disapprobatory attitude towards abortion. This will predispose him to perform or approve of actions aimed at stopping the performance of abortions. Moral beliefs, *qua* expressions of attitudes, thus motivate us to act. The relativist (at least the emotivist) is able to maintain the internal connection between motivation and belief and so respond to the motivational challenge.

Section 4: Ethical Disagreement and the rationality of moral discourse

Diversity ranges over superficial differences right up to deep disagreement. Richardson (1994: 237-243) distinguishes between three different levels of disagreement. The most basic level of disagreement "...occurs when values are similar but incompatible" (Richardson, 1994: 237). The second level of disagreement occurs when there is disagreement about what the final ends to be sought are. The third level of disagreement is 'deep disagreement' and "...involves clashes between entire conceptions of value" (Richardson, 1994: 238). Richardson notes that differences between such conceptions of value include "...contrasting models of reasoning, dissimilar concrete exemplars of virtue, and differing sets of propositions regarded as unquestionable" (1994: 238). It is important not to reduce deep disagreement to the second level of disagreement. The second level of disagreement need not involve, for example, differing models of reasoning or dissimilar exemplars of virtues. There need not be a striking difference between the two groups who hold different convictions on

the issue of an independent *volkstaat*¹⁰. Furthermore, there are subtle features of deep disagreement that are essential to understanding deep disagreement. These features are lost once one collapses deep disagreement onto the second level of disagreement. Richardson notes three such features. First, one must understand that the value clashes that characterize deep disagreement are complex and develop in differing contexts. The conflict that arises from deep disagreement can only be fully understood if these variations in the various ends are understood within the differing contexts that shape them. So, for example, those groups that differ on the issue of a *volkstaat* are still members of the same larger community that comprises South Africa. Individuals from these opposing groups are likely to have fundamental similarities in their mode of reasoning. It is likely, for example, that they have similar axiomatic beliefs about the importance of property rights such as the benefits that accrue to land ownership. At a deeper level, they are also likely to share *tacit* principles that guide their reasoning on such issues. An example would be the tacit assumption that the outcome of the debate should be determined by the strength of the considerations in favour of a *volkstaat*. It is not likely, for example, that either group will vest the power to decide the issue in some religious authority. All of these similarities in the background assumptions and principles that guide the disputes at this second level of conflict would be absent at the third level. In cases of deep disagreement, the differing *contexts* within which the opposing beliefs are formed are integral to understanding the nature of the conflict. In such cases, many of the background assumptions and principles invoked by the interlocutors will be different. For example, someone who grows up in a fundamentalist, religious community are likely to employ models of reasoning that contrasts strikingly with those of individuals who grow up in secular, liberal communities. In order to appreciate the nature of deep disagreement, it is therefore crucial to understand the contexts within which the beliefs of individuals are formed. By reducing deep disagreement to the second level of disagreement, one would be focusing on the academic differences between the values rather than the individuals who hold these values dear. Secondly, such a reduction masks the fact that each person's bundle of ends is irreducibly complex. So one needs to pay attention to how a specific individual orders and ranks the various ends that she holds dear. One must be appreciative of the web of beliefs that an individual holds and how this relates to the context within which that web of beliefs was formed. Thirdly, by merely looking at the ends themselves, one would not be appreciating how the different worldviews of individuals relate to the ends that the individual seek. These

¹⁰ A *volkstaat* is an independent white Afrikaner state that some members of the Afrikaner community have been demanding in South Africa.

subtle aspects about the individual, the environment within which she lives and how she relates to that environment are fundamental to deep disagreement. It would therefore be a mistake not to keep deep disagreement separate from the other levels of disagreement.

The focus of this section will be on deep disagreement, since it is deep disagreement that presents the challenge of relativism in its strongest form. If there is no fundamental overlap even in the models of reasoning between two disputants, then it seems that the two disputants are talking past each other. In other words, we cannot even describe their differences since there is no common conceptual ground within which we could describe their differences. I offer the following example of deep disagreement. The example serves the following purposes. First, it is intended to illustrate an instance of deep disagreement. Second, it shows that such deep disagreement can be described in terms of the conceptual gap that exists between the disputants. These two purposes serve as the basis for refuting the claim by some relativists that there is no ethical disagreement since it shows such disagreement to be both real and intelligible in conceptual terms. Finally, the example shows in what respect Richardson's account of deep disagreement is flawed. It is not the case that deep disagreement must involve all of the following features: "...contrasting models of reasoning, dissimilar concrete exemplars of virtue, and differing sets of propositions." Deep disagreement is deeper than the second level of disagreement but would not be intelligible if the differences were as fundamental as Richardson suggests. I depart from Richardson's model in this respect.

The *Umhlanga* example

This is a Swazi ritual that takes place in September, involving childless, unmarried girls. They travel to the royal kraal to honour the Queen Mother and perform traditional dances. On their way, they pick up reeds and it is from this custom that the *Umhlanga* is also known as the reed dance. The ceremony serves three purposes: it preserves the chastity of the girls, provides tribute labour for the Queen mother and produce solidarity by working together. The King has recently started to choose a wife from one of the young girls who attend the reed ceremony. This custom came under the international spotlight recently when a woman, Lindiwe Dlamini, laid charges against the monarch alleging that he had abducted her 18-year-old daughter, Zena Mahlangu, so as to marry her as his 10th wife. She subsequently withdrew the charges and Zena reportedly willingly took part in a traditional wedding ceremony to become the King's 10th wife. It is not clear whether the following aspects are part of

tradition. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, we can imagine that to be the case. Part of this tradition requires that the unmarried girl sleep with the King before the wedding take place. After they have had sex, she faces the family of the King outside their sleeping quarters and gets verbally insulted. She is expected to get onto her knees and to weep till the early hours of the morning. The consent of the girl is also not a prerequisite for marriage. In many parts of Africa, the practice of abducting a girl to coerce her into marriage is seen as an acceptable tradition and known as *Ukhutwala*).

Consider the reaction of two women from differing societies to this tradition. Faith is a woman who grew up in Swaziland and she seems to have accepted the rules and traditions of the Swazi society. Angela is a woman who grew up in a very liberal household in a Western democratic country. When asking Faith whether or not she thinks that the practise of *Umhlanga* violates the rights of women, she gives the following response. "There is no violation of anyone's rights! The practise is one that has important value for the community as a whole. It celebrates our womanhood and instils a sense of solidarity among the young woman. This is important since co-operation is integral to our communal way of life. It is an honour for every girl to express this sense of community in song and dance." When pressed about the fact that some of the girls are subsequently married by the King, without their consent, and having to perform the humiliating practise of being verbally insulted by the King's relatives, she responds as follows. "It is an honour for the family of every girl that she be asked to marry the King. It is also recognition of the fact that the King, who is the grandest symbol of our culture, has seen in the girl the potential for continuing the lived aspects of our customs. The submissiveness that the girl shows when she weeps after being verbally chastised by the King's relatives is an expression of her humility. Humility is a cherished value in our society". The response of Angela, however, is markedly different to that of Faith. She says the following about the treatment of women that during the *Umhlanga*. " This practise violates the dignity of women and it treats them unequally. The verbal insults that the bride-to-be experiences assaults the self-worth of the girl and treats her an object to be used for royal purposes. This is an infringement on her dignity, which she is entitled to as a human being. Furthermore, the fact that her consent is not necessary for to marry the King denies her the right of being treated equally and with respect. She is given the status of a minor who is unable to make a competent decision about her own well-being. This is a set back for women's attempt to achieve substantive equality". Richardson concluded a description of a similar example as follows:

The disagreement is dramatic on its face. It is connected, furthermore, with wildly different views about how positions on such matters are to be justified. And it is rooted in strikingly contrasting ways of life, in concrete customs that contrast markedly (1994: 243).

The example can be analysed as follows. Faith and Angela's contrasting responses reveal a deep level of disagreement. They have differing values towards the center of their web of beliefs. For Faith, such values as 'honour', 'humility' and 'community' are ranked very highly. This does not necessarily mean that 'equality', 'autonomy' and other such liberal values are not important. But they are less important than the more central values that reflect the communal nature of the Swazi society. For Angela, on the other hand, these core liberal values of 'autonomy', 'individuality' and 'equality' are at the center of her web of beliefs. She may also think that such values as 'honour', 'humility' and 'community' are important, but have a lesser status in her belief-set than the core values. The disagreement between Faith and Angela is a genuine conflict about who has the more appropriate ordering and ranking of these various values. A further mark of deep disagreement is that they have differing exemplars of certain values. Whereas Faith, for example, sees the weeping of the bride-to-be as an exemplary instance of humility, Angela sees it as an exemplary instance of compromising someone's dignity. A more exemplary case of humility, for Angela, would be the graceful acceptance of congratulatory remarks about some groundbreaking research that one had concluded. This shows that even where there is an overlap in the values that appear in their respective value systems, Faith and Angela's contrasting ways of life have resulted in them having different exemplars of these various values. This shows the relation between the lived experiences of individuals and their conceptualisation of various values. The sources of deep disagreement in this example are twofold: First, there is marked difference in the ordering and ranking of the various values. Second, there is a marked difference, rooted in the differing live experiences, in what the exemplars of the varying values are.

I draw four conclusions from this example. First, the example illustrates an instance of deep disagreement. It is clear that there is a fundamental clash between these two disputants as to which is the morally appropriate attitude towards the *Umhlanga*. It is not the case that they are merely arguing past each other or referring to different things in their respective moral judgments. So it follows that this is an instance of moral disagreement. Faith and Angela are not merely *expressing* their points of view. Their points of view can be made sense of in

terms of the reasons that can be offered for the respective points of view. Secondly, it is an instance of deep disagreement. This is evidenced by the fact that there is a profound difference in the ordering and ranking of various core values and, furthermore, that the lived experiences of the disputants have resulted in tacit but deeply ingrained contrasting exemplars of what counts as instances of certain values. Third, the conceptual gaps between the disputants can be described in terms of these structural differences in their web of core values. Finally, the example also shows in what respect my analysis of deep disagreement differs from Richardson. Richardson never makes it clear whether his criteria for deep disagreement are necessary and sufficient conditions for deep disagreement. He merely states that deep disagreement involves "...contrasting models of reasoning, dissimilar concrete exemplars of virtue, and differing sets of propositions." I would contend that the first criterion, 'contrasting models of reasoning', is not a necessary condition for deep disagreement. It would not be possible to make sense of the disagreement between two disputants if such disagreement could not be couched in terms of some common elements in the conceptual schemes of the disputants. Put simply, there must be some common ground between two interlocutors in order to make sense of there being actual disagreement between them. That does not mean that such disagreement is not deep. Take the example above. Faith and Angela have many values that appear in both of their webs of values. However, there is still deep disagreement between them due to certain structural differences in their respective web of values, and the relation of those values to their respective lived experiences. But there need not be 'contrasting models of reasoning' as such. So it follows that there is deep disagreement and that we can make sense of such disagreement without their having to be fundamental differences in the conceptual schemes of the disputants. In the next section I explore Richardson's characterization of what the 'barriers to mutual understanding' are, which are the barriers that allow us to measure the level of disagreement between two disputants.

Richardson states that these barriers "...create something like an incommensurability of conceptual schemes by making it difficult to appreciate the justification of each conception from the point of view of the other" (1994: 266)¹¹. These three barriers are the facts that (a)

¹¹ It must be noted that I restrict myself to giving an exposition of Richardson's positive account of how we could measure deep disagreement. This is sufficient for my purposes, that of debunking the claim by some relativists that there is no ethical disagreement. I omit the detailed arguments that precede Richardson's exposition of his positive account. He first provides an exposition of Davidson arguments against both total and partial conceptual incommensurability. If Davidson's position is accepted, then we are unable to make sense of deep disagreement in terms of conceptual commensurability. Richardson accepts Davidson's argument against total conceptual incommensurability but offers a defense of partial conceptual incommensurability. The three

much of what is learned is seemingly *a priori* or definitional; (b) much learning is tacit and (c) different cognitive ends implicitly define theoretical or intellectual success. I turn to an exposition of each of these barriers in the next section, in order to meet the second prong of the relativist challenge.

Section 2: Can we measure ethical disagreement?

I will discuss each barrier to mutual understanding in turn. First, there will be many propositions whose core import the person will take to be strongly resistant to change. An example of such a proposition in the moral sphere would be the general claim that torture is almost never excusable. Barriers to mutual understanding often result from the fact that interlocutors are working with incompatible hardened or axiomatic propositions. Richardson takes it to be a feature of the conceptual scheme of a person that she takes certain propositions to be axiomatic, given the interconnectedness of such propositions with all else that is said or thought in her culture. The salient point is that these hardened propositions are taken to *judge* and *compare* experience rather than being revised in response to experience.

The second barrier to mutual understanding comes from the fact that much of what we learn is learned tacitly. Whilst hardened positions are responsible for the development of a general paradigm in a person, tacit learning involves more particular paradigms. They typically involve, for example, salient examples that give rigour to a particular concept that we possess. Such tacit learning is lost to consciousness and so can form a barrier to understanding that we might not be aware of. Such exemplars give meaning and life to a concept. So, for example, if one grew up under a democratic but extremely corrupt government, one may well come to hold views that are founded on this (accidental) connection between democracy and corruption. Thus one may hold views of democracy that are reflective of the exemplary case to which one has been exposed. Such exemplars can cause divergences in the conceptual schemes of two persons.

barriers to mutual understanding that I will presently discuss provide the necessary material for making sense of the partial conceptual incommensurability that is sufficient for measuring deep disagreement. Davidson gives a full defense of his position in the seminal paper, "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme".

The third barrier to mutual understanding is differing convictions about what counts as intellectual or theoretic success with regards to certain cognitive ends. So, for example, one may take it to be a virtue of a particular argument that it is compatible with the metaphysics of a prevailing religious outlook. Those arguments that are incompatible with the said metaphysics would then have a lesser intellectual appeal. Another example would be the conviction that clarity in writing is a mark of good philosophy. This means that texts that may well be philosophically more sophisticated would have a lesser intellectual appeal than those texts that are clearer in the exposition of their arguments, even if such arguments could be shown to be weaker by those who examine both texts closely. It follows on Richardson's account that we can make sense of conceptual incommensurability with respect to these barriers to mutual understanding. So while we do not have a precise overall measure of the depth of disagreement, we can understand deep disagreement as consisting in the extent to which two conceptual schemes block their adherents from mutual understanding.

What Richardson's account shows, therefore, is that deep disagreement is a genuine phenomenon and one that could be understood in terms of certain barriers to mutual understanding. I have used his insights in order to respond to some of the relativist's concerns. Both conventionalists and simple subjectivists wrongly denied that there is ethical disagreement. Conventionalism erroneously infers from the prevailing differing moral outlooks that there is no ethical disagreement. Such disagreement is mere illusion. Simple subjectivism, on the other hand, erroneously characterises moral language as mere reports about the attitudes of moral agents. But consider a dispute between Sipho and Thandi on the issue of abortion. On one level, they are reporting facts about their respective attitudes towards abortion. However, this is a thin characterization of what is happening in such contexts. We can imagine Sipho and Thandi trying to persuade each other of the correctness of their individual points of view. This stems from the conviction that one is right on the matter and shows a willingness to have one's belief publicly expressed and assessed. Typically neither interlocutor is convinced that their respective beliefs are opaque. There is a willingness to engage in a dialectic process so as to bring the other person round to understanding and accepting the reasons for one's own point of view. Indeed, as Sturgeon points out¹², a standard motivation for learning from others, understanding them and seeking common intellectual ground is the possibility of discovering truth from their opinions¹³. If it is

¹² Sturgeon explains this point in greater detail in "Moral disagreement and moral relativism"

¹³ The classic expression of this argument can be found in Mill's *On Liberty*.

the case that we are merely arguing past each other, then this motivation for dialogue and debate is undercut. (He acknowledges that this does not render relativist theories false but provides a good practical argument to endorse any such theory only as a last resort since it could result in significant loss to moral life in a pluralistic society). Furthermore, in an ideal argumentation context, each interlocutor will be willing to change her own point of view, should the reasons of the other's point of view have greater rational grounding. Such intellectual honesty may or may not take place. The salient point is that it is surely insufficient to characterize the expression of contradictory moral claims as *mere* expressions of different attitudes towards a moral issue. A more thorough examination of the typical contexts within which such moral claims are made must provide a richer and more accurate description. Simple subjectivism underdescribes such situations. Richer descriptions of such contexts reveal at least *prima facie* instances of genuine moral disagreement. If we are to reject such disagreement as mere illusion, then we need to account for the appearance of genuine moral disagreement. This analysis will also apply *mutatis mutandis* to cases of deep disagreement. In other words, once we have isolated those barriers to mutual understanding that reveal a degree of conceptual incommensurability between two persons from two different cultures, it would simply be incorrect to state that such differences are not genuine¹⁴.

Consider again the example about attitudes towards female rape in Pakistan .A typical Western liberal attitude clashes with those of the Pakistani jurist who believes in the correctness of the Pakistani legal position and defends the treatment of rape victims in her country. It seems ridiculous to describe the contrary views that are held by these interlocutors as *simply* contrary expressions of their attitudes. The moral language that they use to express their views may of course serve an expressive and directive function at one level – *expressing* the moral attitude of the one interlocutor, which also serves to *direct* the other to change her mind. But these expressive and directive functions do not exclude the simultaneous *cognitive* function of conveying information about one's moral attitude that seeks to *justify* it and so

¹⁴ Of course it may still be objected that even if all of this is conceded, it is not clear what could be done, rationally, to solve the disagreement between the disputants. This is a largely practical question that will likely involve considerations of public policy. It falls outside the scope of this paper to offer a comprehensive outline of how to resolve such disagreement. The various measures would include, for example, long-term considerations such as an appropriate upbringing that would predispose moral agents to being susceptible to rational discourse. The important point for the scope of this paper is simply to show that there is ethical disagreement and, furthermore, that it can be measured in conceptual terms.

show the contrary view to be incorrect. Whatever the outcome of the exchange, it is clear that these facts about the case show such instances to be cases of genuine moral disagreement. Cases of deep disagreement would be underdescribed if one analyses them as mere expressions of incompatible evaluative and belief systems. There appears to be genuine disagreement with respect to what the correct value system is that a rational agent is to adopt and the concomitant beliefs that such a conceptual scheme would give rise to. Simple subjectivists claim that there is no moral disagreement. There are no facts to disagree about. Given the fact that there is a clear *prima facie* case for assessing such disagreement as genuine, simple subjectivism must at least account for why it appears to be a case of genuine moral disagreement. This is what is missing in simple subjectivism and thus renders the theory implausible

Section 3: Emotivism¹⁵ and the rationality of moral discourse

In the introduction it has already been shown that emotivism does attempt to account for moral disagreement. It does so as a more complex theory about moral language. It is an improvement in this respect on both conventionalism and simple subjectivism. However, it fails to provide an adequate role for reason in moral discourse. If it is true that moral statements are attempts at changing the behaviour of other people, as emotivists contend, then it follows that any speech act that is able to change one's behaviour will become admissible in moral discourse. It allows, for example, for false information, rhetoric or fallacious reasoning being used as legitimate tools in bringing about changes in others' attitudes and behaviour. If Sipho were to bring about a change in Thandi's attitude by knocking her over the head with a beer bottle, emotivists would be unable to rule out such action as not being a *rational* move in the moral discourse¹⁶. It does not allow for a delineation of what counts as suitable evidence in support of one's attitudes. It is not premised on any normative rules of argumentation. In other words, emotivism undermines itself by excluding the undeniable rationality of moral discourse from its analysis of the nature of moral language. It is surely the case that only some evidence will be reasonable, while others will not be. For example, if Sipho were to explain and rationally establish the importance of rights to bodily and psychological integrity to Thandi, and argue that these rights are trumped with no justification in cases of abortion,

¹⁵ Stevenson is widely regarded as one of the best defenders of emotivism. See, for example, his paper "The emotive meaning of ethical terms".

¹⁶ Such an action may be cowardly, illegal and even immoral, but it is not clear that there is a reason internal to the emotivist's moral discourse that can be offered against such action.

then Thandi's subsequent change in attitude would be a function of *rational* persuasion. This would obviously depend on the details of Sipho's argument. But the point of the example is clear. The issues of bodily and psychological integrity, women's rights, the status of the foetus etc. are relevant to the issue at hand. The acceptability of Sipho's evidence will depend on the strength of the case that he makes for the centrality of not violating or compromising one's bodily and psychological integrity, with specific reference to the issue of abortion. Evidence that refers to the clothing worn by Thandi, or to her dislike for a particular public servant who opposes abortion, would be no evidence at all. Should Thandi change her attitude in response to *these* bits of discourse, such a change would not be a function of rational discourse. The entire enterprise of rational discourse would be undermined. This is surely undesirable, as all moral and doxastic agents want to hold beliefs that are best grounded in the available evidence¹⁷.

The relativist may, of course, deny that there is or can be rational discourse here. I am not making the circular claim that the relativist's position undermines rational discourse. The relativist is sceptical precisely about the possibility of rational discourse. I am rather claiming that the example of Sipho and Thandi's discourse shows a clear distinction between what counts as rational discourse and what falls outside rational discourse. The relativist position is thus committed to two undesirable consequences. First, it has to deny the distinction between rational and nonrational discourse. This seems to be simply incorrect when examples such as the one offered are analysed. Second, by denying that there can be rational discourse, relativists (including the emotivists) are unable to justify what can account as legitimate evidence in moral discourse. They have no argumentation norms with respect to moral discourse. A more rational and normative account of ethics needs to be developed so that we can make sense of moral discourse and set standards for the moves that disputants can make in moral arguments.

Section 4: Lessons from the philosophy of belief

¹⁷ This follows from the fact that beliefs constitutively aim at truth. It follows that I when I believe that X, I believe that X is true. It follows, further, that doxastic agents cannot hold beliefs that they sincerely judge not be grounded in the best available evidence. This point is amplified in William's seminal paper, "Deciding to believe".

An analogue in the philosophy of belief can illuminate the importance of reason. One of the constitutive features of beliefs is that they are propositions that a doxastic agent take to be true of the world. If I believe that there are ten people in the room, I take it to be true of the world that there are ten people in the room¹⁸. Beliefs constitutively aim at truth. This allows one to hold doxastic agents accountable for their beliefs. Every doxastic agent is susceptible to a judgment of justification¹⁹. In other words, one can demand reasons of a doxastic agent as to why she holds a certain belief. Not just any reason will do - she must provide a reason that shows a rational basis for her holding the belief. So, for example, by pointing to the car driving past, she can immediately show the plausibility of her belief that there is an old lady in the car. There is an immediate and direct causal route between the way the world is and how she perceives it to be. In other words, the propositional content of her perceptual belief is justified because it bears an appropriate relationship to the world. Given that the belief itself is also true, she could be said to possess knowledge about the world²⁰. If she admitted that an hallucinogenic caused her to hold the belief, this will be a non-rational grounding of the belief. It is not a causal route that is reliable in generating true claims about the world. Even if the propositional content of the belief was true, she is not justified in holding that belief. So when we demand reasons of a doxastic agent as to why she holds a particular belief, we are not (just) interested in a causal account of how her belief came about. We are interested in the rationality of that belief which depends on what kind of reasons she gives in defense of her holding that particular belief. Different writers will of course dispute the appropriate justificatory standard, but there is agreement that one ought to hold beliefs that are justified and which aims at truth – whatever the justificatory model may be that one works with. All of this follows from the constitutive characteristics of beliefs.

It is similarly the case that when someone makes an ethical judgment, they are susceptible to a judgment of justification. The moral agent needs to provide reasons for her belief that abortion is acceptable and show how those reasons lend rational support to her ethical view. A causal account of how she came to hold that belief (e.g. witnessing the social impact of unwanted pregnancies) would count as a rational justification only if it shown how it relates to and provides appropriate support for the judgment that abortion is acceptable. This is the role

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Jones argues for this model of doxastic accountability in "Our accountability for believing".

²⁰ I am aware that Gettier challenged this definition of what counts as knowledge in "Is justified true belief knowledge?" This is not of any consequence to my discussion. The salient point that I am making is simply that we are not justified in holding a belief if that belief is inappropriately grounded.

that reason has to play if we are to endorse an account of ethical disagreement that has a rational, normative component. Such a normative account is important in order to avoid the arbitrariness of evidence that emotivists have to admit into discourse on ethical matters. If this is not the case, then any nonrational means of persuasion will become acceptable in ethical debate. It follows that despite its complexity and improvement over simple subjectivism, emotivism is decisively flawed. It does not allow for the undeniable rationality of ethical discourse.

Section 5: On Moral Progress.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find examples of what would universally be considered as instances of moral progress. Many would claim that the lives of individuals are worse off now than before. It is controversial and difficult to assess the overall state of modern society. Indeed, I would be loath to defend the claim that there is an historical, linear progression towards some definable good that at least some societies are approximating. This would require a complete taxonomy and defence of the appropriate conditions for such overall progress and the further burden of showing how some societies have achieved those conditions. I do not wish to enter into debate on the overall state of modernity. However, even sceptics would have to concede that moral progress has taken place in *some* areas of human history. I premise the rest of my argument on an exemplary case of 'moral progress'.

A clear case of 'moral progress' is the achievement of formal and substantive equality in South Africa over the past decade. This means that the current society is more egalitarian in respect of how the law treats citizens. This equal treatment is what formal equality expresses. Substantive equality recognises that equal treatment before the law is not sufficient to achieve a genuinely egalitarian society if the society under consideration is massively unequal in terms of the distribution of resources. It supplements formal equality by allowing for policy formation that seeks to achieve greater equity by redistributing resources in various ways. The temporarily unequal treatment that this entails is itself justified along egalitarian considerations. This change is not just good because it is practically useful in eliminating racial and other conflict. If that were the only basis of assessing change, then it would be easy to describe it in amoral and solely pragmatic terms. It would simply be 'good' change in instrumental terms i.e. creating more stable structures for the functioning of society. This would be a functional justification. Such an assessment of the change in South Africa is surely

incomplete. It leaves out the intrinsic goodness of this change. Recognising the arbitrariness of an unequal consideration of citizens' interests is not just instrumentally useful. It is an affirmation of the equal worth of all citizens. This is a positive change. This represents a change from the compromising of various groups' human dignity to an affirmation of those groups' human dignity. I submit that this intrinsic goodness represents moral progress. It means that we are better off now than we were fifty years ago. However, what is implicit in this claim is a transcultural comparison of South African society at an earlier time with a later time. Such a comparison only makes sense if it is premised on some objective basis that lends rational justification to the claims to moral progress. In the above example, for instance, the objective principle that allowed for the comparison between South Africa at different points in its history, states that 'Moral progress is achieved when a legal system equally affirms the equal worth of its citizens'. Given an independent justification of the principle of equality (e.g. as developed, for example, by Singer²¹), it follows that the achievement of racial equality constitutes moral progress in light of the Principle of Equality.

What can the relativist say about moral progress? Relativists have to claim that the concept of moral progress is either incoherent or fails to apply to the world. They must either deny either that one can make transcultural comparisons or, alternatively, that such comparison does not admit of objective evaluation. We cannot say of one state of affairs that it is better than another. Any usage of the concept would commit them to an objective basis for making transcultural comparisons, thus negating the very essence of relativism. We must either accept relativism and abandon the concept of moral progress or retain the concept of moral progress and abandon relativism. Given my argument for the meaningfulness and application of the concept of moral progress, I submit that this is another *reductio* against relativism.

Conclusions

Ethical relativism is attractive because it is based on careful empirical observation as well as a seemingly plausible account of the nature of moral language. It provides a basis for promoting

²¹ Singer develops such a defence in Chapter 2 of **Practical ethics**.

respect and tolerance of different, incompatible conceptions of the good. It is the bases of liberal, pluralistic societies and the general promotion of self-determination in the post- World War II socio-political context. These are the political and social sources of relativism. I acknowledge the benefits of relativism in fostering respect for difference. However, this chapter has shown that there is no philosophical basis for holding on to the relativist position. The decisive mistake in relativist accounts of ethics is that they fail to provide an adequate account of the nature of moral disagreement and to appreciate the role of rationality in the settling of such disagreement.

Chapter 3

The challenge of Humean psychology

Introduction

What does it mean to be motivated by moral facts, if there are any such facts that we can grasp? Emotivists, for example, state that there is an internal connection between motivation and moral belief. In other words, to have a moral belief is to have a certain sort of attitude and attitudes are dispositions to act. They are thus able to respond to the motivation problem. Objectivists need to show that moral facts have the requisite motivational force that people can act on²². This chapter gives a detailed exposition of, and a defence against, the motivation challenge. I sketch the position of Hume and subsequent developments by Mackie and Williams. I show that rational considerations can motivate us to act.

Hume argues that when we engage in practical reasoning, we act on the basis of certain motivations that we have for performing particular actions. We are motivated to act on the basis of our contingent set of wants and desires. I sketch the Humean position by looking at two aspects of the model²³. First, I look at Hume's characterisation of the phenomenology of practical deliberation. This is important since the key difference between Hume's position and the Kantian position developed by Nagel is their characterisation of practical deliberation. Second, I provide an analysis of the role of reason in practical deliberation. Hume is often accused of restricting reason to an instrumental role. He contends that it is mere illusion to ascribe to reason any significant role in our deliberative process or our reactive attitudes.

²² It is controversial to claim that reason rather than such sources as evolution generates these moral facts. I argue elsewhere in this thesis that an essential feature of all moral facts is that they can be derived rationally, even if such derivation depends in part on importing various empirical considerations.

²³ I follow Blackburn's interpretation of Hume which is the most charitable in defending Hume against the very charges that I try to sustain in this chapter.

Finally, I examine Mackie's claim that the Humean position crowds out any reason-based explanation of action.

This chapter argues for the following propositions in showing what is wrong with the Humean position. I argue that a proper characterisation of the phenomenology of practical deliberation requires us to accept the 'two aspects' conception of the self²⁴. This is the only conception of the self that allows us to make sense of our reactive attitudes as well as our practical agency. I also argue that reason plays a significant, non-instrumental role in helping to determine the ends that we desire. All of the arguments for these claims show how moral agents can and often do manage to allow rational considerations to determine what they are motivated to do. It follows that despite being grounded in rational considerations moral facts do have the requisite motivational force.

Section 1: The phenomenology of practical deliberation

A particular action that we choose to perform would satisfy a particular want or desire. This is what motivates us to perform that particular action. So, for example, when I decide to eat an apple instead of a slice of cheesecake, I do so because my contingent desire for an apple is stronger than that for a slice of cheesecake. It is often suggested that this characterisation of deliberation does not fit our phenomenology of deliberation. It is rather the case that when we are deliberating, we are actively deciding what to do. We are *choosing* rather than *finding ourselves* doing something. This criticism attributes to Hume a characterisation of the practical agent as a passive bystander to the deliberative process playing itself out through the agent. I draw on Blackburn and Williams in defending the Humean position.

Blackburn argues that such a characterisation of the Humean position as being passive is based on the faulty distinction between a 'noumenal' and empirical self and a postulation of the former as being critical to deliberation. Because Hume sketches an empirical picture of the 'self', it then follows that Hume's characterisation of agency does not fit our phenomenology. The mistake in this analysis is with respect to the postulation of a 'noumenal' self. Our practical agency should be recognised as consisting in not only what we do but also what we

²⁴ This view ascribes both a 'noumenal' and empirical aspect to the self. The distinction is explained below.

desire and value. Once practical agency is cast in this light, there is no reason to claim that Hume cannot characterise the deliberative process as active. As Blackburn puts it:

...once the trick of separating the Kantian self (the 'noumenal' self) from the empirical nature of the person has been played, then the self conceived as determined by that empirical nature seems passive, and ordinary experience may seem to refute the model. But disallow the trick, and the charge of passivity falls with it (1998: 252).

There are four claims in the Humean position that need to be made explicit. First, I explain the empirical conception of the self that Hume defends. Second, I show how a 'noumenal' conception of the self, based on the philosophy of Kant, is implicit in Nagel's rationalist alternative to the Humean position. I examine the Humean claim that such a conception of the self is incoherent. Third, I show how Hume accounts for the illusion that a 'noumenal' self is experienced in deliberation. Finally, I examine whether or not the empirical conception fits the dynamic nature of practical agency and whether it can make sense of our reactive attitudes.

The first claim is that an empirical conception of the self is the correct conception of our practical agency. One's agency must be understood as consisting in a bundle of wants, desires and actions that constitute one at a particular moment. The various forces within the context that we live tend to define the features of our empirical selves. These may include, for example, various political, economic, social and other forces. Blackburn expresses this when he states that:

You, when you deliberate, are whatever you are: a person of tangled desires, conflicting attitudes to your parents, inchoate ambitions, preferences, and ideals, with an inherited ragbag of attitudes to different actions, situations, and characters. You do not manage, ever, to stand apart from that (1998: 252).

The second claim is that the noumenal conception of the self is incoherent. The 'noumenal' self is an abstraction from the empirical traits of the self. It is able to step back from the contingent desires of an agent, and make choices independent of these contingent desires.

This is what is involved in exercising moral freedom. The morally correct choices are rationally necessitated. On a strict Kantian interpretation, these moral laws are a priori laws that constrain all intelligent creatures in the deliberation of their actions. But Kant also claimed that the 'noumenal' self is not subject to the law of causation. This is what generates the freedom of the 'noumenal' self. A charitable interpretation of this noumenal/empirical distinction would be to understand them as two *aspects* of human agency rather than two distinct subjects of an agent's actions and choices. So the empirical aspect of the self would be identical with Hume's conception of the self whilst the 'noumenal' self is able to adopt a second-order deliberative stance from whence it can assess the first-order desire and wants of an agent. It is this conception of the 'noumenal' self that is the source of practical deliberation. Because Hume endorses the passive conception of the self, it seems to follow that Hume has to maintain a passive picture of practical deliberation that does not fit our phenomenology.

Blackburn responds by showing that the 'noumenal' conception of the self is incoherent. First, we cannot step back from our desires to the second-order view from nowhere as postulated by Nagel. This is because we cannot postulate a self that is free from the empirical forces that shape our practical agency. It is a vacuous conception of the self. Second, the 'two aspects' interpretation of Kant is aimed at avoiding the postulation of a second (noumenal) ontology. But is not clear that the 'two aspects' interpretation is able to avoid this charge. The 'two aspects' interpretation assumes that there is a context-free control by reason *in addition to* the sentiments of an agent. This amounts to the postulation of a second (noumenal) ontology.

The third claim is that it is mere illusion to think that there genuinely is a noumenal self that we experience in practical deliberation. Blackburn describes this by stating that we are mistaken in thinking that when we deliberate, there is some 'independent tribunal', that of reason, to which we can refer the weighing of our various competing desires. Our contingent values and desires are always influencing how we assess and react to the facts of the world in deciding what to do. He states that:

Making desires the object of deliberation, rather than features of the person determining the selection and weighing of external features, inevitably leads to postulating an inner deliberator (1998: 255).

The salient point is that it is a mistake to locate deliberation in some aspect of the self that is free of one's desires and wants. The objects of deliberations are the various features of the external world with which the self interacts. It is not the case that deliberation consists in a "... process of introspecting our own consciousness..." (1998: 254). Blackburn claims that the source of our impulse to find a noumenal self is the emotional pressure of wanting our deliberations to be justified in terms that lie beyond our contingent wants and desires. What Blackburn does not discuss is why such emotional pressure persists. It may well be, for example, that the irresistibility of such emotional pressure reveals just how committed we are as moral (and doxastic) agents to performing those actions that can be rationally justified. If this is the right analysis of why such emotional pressure persists, then it undercuts Blackburn's glib assumption (which he fails to justify) that such emotional pressure is simply a bad bit of our human psychology²⁵.

It follows that Hume denies that there are 'noumenal' selves that are the loci of practical deliberation. Blackburn has shown that this denial does not commit Hume to the characterisation of practical deliberation as a passive process. A proper understanding of the empirical self shows that Hume can defend a conception of practical agency that is active and consists in the values, desires and actions of the agent. This defence of the Humean position shows that Hume is able to account for the dynamic nature of our sets of wants and desires.

This aspect of the Humean picture is greatly enriched by Williams in his paper "Internal and External Reasons" (1981). Williams remains true to the basic Humean picture while providing a much richer characterisation, showing that an empirical conception of the self does fit the dynamic nature of practical agency. It is precisely in order to avoid the charge of 'passivity' that Williams develops the Humean position by giving a dynamic characterisation of agents' subjective motivational set. Williams (1981: 101-113) starts by introducing the concept of an external reason statement. This concept fits our practice of taking others to have reason to perform certain actions regardless of their wants and desires. The Humean argument is extended by showing that our practices must be mistaken since the concept of external reasons is incoherent. This is an upshot of the Humean position that was not developed by Hume himself. Moral facts are a species of external reasons.

²⁵ I am indebted to Veli Motiva for pointing out how Blackburn's description of the emotional pressures that agents face undercuts his argument.

The objections that Williams level against external reasons apply *ipso facto* to moral facts. The central part of the objection contends that external reasons (and moral facts by implication) lack motivational force. This argument differs from the Humean one in that it introduces and develops the concept of a subjective motivational set (S). While the content of S can be couched in familiar Humean terms, Williams gives a richer characterisation of the nature of an agent's S. This characterisation simultaneously allows Williams to concede that our wants and desires²⁶ are dynamic whilst giving him reason to deny that there are external reasons.

Williams distinguishes between the external and internal reasons that one might have for performing a particular action. His contention is that there are no external reasons statements. Such statements either do not exist or are something else misleadingly expressed. There are internal reason statements and these can be shown to exist unproblematically. An internal reason statement is a reason for performing an action, where the reason relates to an element in the agent's subjective motivational set. The subjective motivational set, S, contains all the desires, goals, projects, patterns of emotional reaction, dispositions etc. of the agent. A general formulation of the internal reason statement is of the form 'A has reason to ϕ ' as opposed to 'There is a reason to ϕ '. For example, to say that Sipho has a reason to drink beer would be a true internal reason statement if and only if there is an element in Sipho's S, such as a desire for beer, that would be satisfied were Sipho to drink a beer. Or it may be said that Sipho has a reason to emigrate if it is the case that there is an element in Sipho's S, such as the goal of raising his children in a non-violent society, that would be satisfied by his leaving South Africa.

Internal reason statements have motivational force because there is an internal connection between the internal reason statement and the subjective motivational set, thus providing a disposition to act. The motivation challenge is therefore met. Having the desire to drink beer and therefore an internal reason to do so, predisposes Sipho towards going to the pub and buying himself a beer. Similarly, having an internal reason to immigrate predisposes Sipho toward applying to emigration agencies to assist him in leaving the country. Internal reason

²⁶ The Humean position, for example, is often attacked for not allowing such processes as deliberation to impinge on our wants and desires. Whether or not this is an exegetically fair exposition of the Humean position, Williams' argument is preferable to Hume's because it is not susceptible to this charge.

statements also allow one to rationalise and explain the behaviour of an agent relative to the agent's subjective motivational set. One can explain Sipho's beer drinking with reference to his desire to drink beer and his immigration with reference to his goals of raising his children in a non-violent society.

Finally, the subjective motivational set is not static. It is dynamic and can thus contract and expand, given various processes such as experience, jogging one's memory etc. So, for example, someone who supports a particular political party that advocates a welfare state may discover upon reflection that he has a latent belief about the negative impact that social welfare has on society in its creation of social dependency networks. This is the major advancement on the basic Humean picture. Williams' insight is that various processes tend to shape our wants and desires during the course of our life. This means that someone who has, for example, a by and large socially undesirable S can, subject to various empirical influences, experience a change in the content of her S. The key point is that internal reason statements are uncontroversial because they do not give rise to the motivation problem.

External reasons are of the form, 'There is a reason to ϕ ' as opposed to 'A has a reason to ϕ '. So, for example, it may be the case that all eligible voters have an external reason to vote in every election. Such an external reason may be expressed as follows: 'every eligible voter must vote in every election in order for election results to be legitimate'. Such an external reason for performing a particular action appears unable to respond to the motivation challenge. The reason is as follows. Such statements are true, independent of the contingent subjective motivational set of an agent. So, regardless of the content of an eligible voter's S, it remains true of that agent that she has an external reason to vote in the upcoming elections. In other words, external reason statements are agent-neutral reasons for action. Their truth does not depend on satisfying the elements of the agent's S. However, this is precisely the problem- if I we are motivated to act whenever a particular element in our subjective motivational set will be satisfied by a particular action, how can we be motivated to act on the grounds of external reasons that supposedly hold true, independent of our contingent wants and desires? If Sipho is disillusioned with the political process and convinced that the democratic process is not good for society, then it seems difficult, on the face of it, to see how the external reason for why he should vote in the upcoming elections will have the requisite motivational force to predispose him towards voting. External reason statements seem impotent precisely because they are agent-neutral.

This connects with an essential feature of moral facts. Moral facts are necessarily agent-neutral. They derive their status from being imperatives that apply to all moral agents regardless of their individual wants and desires. For this reason, the moral objectivist also appears unable to account for how it is possible for such moral facts to have the requisite motivational force to predispose the agent towards action that track these moral facts. If Williams' argument against external reasons is cogent, then it seems that at best the moral objectivist will have to conclude that there are moral facts but that it is merely a matter of constitutive luck²⁷ whether or not a particular agent's S is so constituted that she is predisposed to performing those actions that map onto the moral facts. It is also clear that Williams' argument hinges on an implicit rejection of the 'noumenal' self in favour of an empirical self. It is the empirical self that is essentially constituted by the S of an agent. This is a development of the Humean position because of its richer characterisation of how our wants and desires can change over time whilst still denying that rational considerations can be brought to impinge on these changes within an agent.

We cannot conceive of a 'noumenal' self and so it appears that one is compelled to accept the Humean conception. It follows both that (a) the noumenal/empirical conception of the self is wrong or incoherent and (b) that a proper understanding of the Humean position, supplemented with Williams' characterisation of our subjective motivational sets, is compatible with our practical agency and our phenomenology of deliberation.

Section 2: The role of reason in practical deliberation

In this section I develop three claims made by Hume in describing the role of reason in practical deliberation. First I show what the instrumental role of reason entails. Second, I show how Hume is able to account for the judgments that we usually display in our reactive attitudes. Third, following Mackie, I show that the Humean position lends itself to the claim that reason-based explanations of action are crowded out by psychological accounts as typified by Hume's position. This section is an important aspect of the challenge that the Humean psychology presents for moral objectivity. It is important for two reasons. First, I

²⁷ I use 'constitutive luck' in the sense expressed by Nagel in "Moral Luck" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 50 (1976) 137- 155.

contend that our reactive attitudes only make sense if a noumenal conception of the self is correct. If it is not, as the Humean picture suggests, then we would have to (undesirably) revise our reactive attitudes completely. Second, moral objectivists contend that rational deliberations can impinge on the ends that we develop as agents. This explicitly suggests that reason plays a substantive and not merely an instrumental role in our practical deliberation. If the Humean picture of practical deliberation is correct, however, then moral objectivists err in their assessment of the role of reason in practical deliberation. This section is chiefly intended to give a detailed exposition of how Mackie develops the Humean claim that reason plays only an instrumental role in our practical deliberation. More specifically, Mackie argues that reason-based explanations of human action are 'crowded out' by Humean psychology. This is a serious threat to the cherished substantive role for reason in our practical deliberation, which moral objectivists posit. It therefore needs to be taken seriously.

Hume states that the role of reason in practical deliberation is that of bringing to our attention facts about a situation in which we have to act. Reason can also help us to determine the consequences of various courses of action. We are guided by reason in choosing our means to a chosen end. Blackburn claims that Hume can also readily agree that we can think about our ends and those of others. This is a process of reasoning. Of course, our reaction to the ends that we do think about will itself be informed by the very desires and values that constitute our empirical selves. Reason plays no role in determining the ends we seek. The ends of practical reason are solely a function of our wants and desires. Reason is restricted to an instrumental role, that of finding the most efficient or prudent means of satisfying our given ends. (In so doing, reason can also inform us of all the relevant facts and features about a given situation within which we have to act). So, for example, I may find it more efficient to ask my friend Sipho for his apple than to walk twenty kilometres to the nearest shop where I can buy an apple of my own. I employ reason only in deliberating on what the best means is to satisfy my desire for an apple. This is a naturalistic conception of our actions²⁸. Our desires and wants operate on us in determining what the objects of our practical reasoning are. Reason is an impotent bystander and can at best help us instrumentally. This is what Hume meant by claiming reason to be a slave of the passions.

²⁸ 'Naturalistic' refers to the Humean conception of persons as being constituted by their empirical selves. This can be contrasted with the Kantian notion of a 'noumenal' self that can step back from this empirical context and make second-order judgments that can bear on the first-order wants and desires.

The role of reason is further diminished, claims Blackburn, when we assess what is involved in our judgments of others' actions and characters. Blackburn argues that the impulse that we have in assessing someone's actions as 'irrational' or 'unreasonable' in some instances stems from misidentifying what it is in fact that we are conveying when making such judgments. To say of someone that they are imprudent or selfish or weak-willed is not to claim that there is some defect in their reason but rather that there is some defect in their will or passions. They lack certain traits that it would be desirable for them to have for both their own sake and that of others. This means that Humeans are able to react to others and criticise their actions and dispositions. But what one uses one's own values and desires in criticising others' actions and dispositions rather than invoking some independent standard that is generated by the faculty of reason.

This erosion of the role of reason provided the basic material for Mackie's proposition that reason-based explanations of action are eliminable. Mackie (1977: 15) defends a 'crowding out' thesis, which aims to render the role of reason superfluous in understanding human action. There are two claims implicit in Mackie's argument. First, he claims that reasons do not, in fact, motivate us to act. A causal explanation of our action can be given without invoking any reference to reason. It is mere illusion to think that reasons motivate us to act. All that is required to explain our actions are the facts about our psychology that do motivate us to act. Second, it follows that reasons cannot figure in explanations about human action. They can be eliminated. This implies that it is also mere illusion to think that our actions are susceptible to rational justification. If reasons do no work in motivating us to act, that questions about the justificatory status of our actions cannot be raised. This is a development of the Humean argument. The Humean position fell short of claiming that reason-based explanations of our actions are crowded out by a psychological account. Mackie claims more explicitly that this is in fact the case.

Mackie claims that a complete, self-contained psychological account of human action crowds out any explanatory and causal space for reason or norm-based accounts of human action. Hume's model, for example, shows how various psychological facts causally operate on human agents. It follows that a reason-based account is superfluous. I set out Mackie's argument in four steps. First I explain what it means for a theory to be 'self-contained' and hence to 'crowd out' competing hypotheses. I then show how the Humean model attempts to provide such a self-contained model with regards to human action. I then show how a reason-

based model provides a different account of human action. I conclude by showing how the Humean model crowds out this latter model.

What does it mean for a theory to be self-contained? A theory is self-contained if it provides a complete and exhaustive account of a particular event or class of events or an action or class of actions. So, for example, if I want to explain why the house burnt down, a complete and exhaustive account may be given in terms of the lit candle having been knocked over by the wind blowing through the window, falling over and setting the furniture and house alight. This explanation is complete. I do not need any further information in order to account for the event. It is also exhaustive. Other accounts of the events are not possible. If an alternative hypothesis is offered, it must be at least as good as the explanation put forward. 'Good' here refers to explanatory goodness including, for example, simplicity and inference to the best explanation. If there are two competing hypotheses, one first tests them against these methodological principles. Should both be equally coherent, the thesis that best maps onto our phenomenological experiences should be endorsed. It makes sense to support those theories that keep our folk practices intact unless the alternative theory is not only as good as the one offered but superior to it. It will therefore not be sufficient that the Humean account of action be complete and coherent. It must also be the case that there is no alternative theory available that is superior to it and able to account for our folk conceptions of action. It is only then that the Humean model could be said to have successfully 'crowded out' the competing hypotheses about human action.

The Humean model aims to be self-contained. The facts about an agent's psychic make-up are sufficient to predict what actions she will choose to perform. Those contingent desires that are overwhelming at a particular moment will determine what she does. We could therefore explain her actions in terms of her psychic make-up. Why did Sipho choose an apple? His psychic make-up necessitated his desire for an apple. References to other factors are not necessary in order to explain his action²⁹. So, for example, references to his intentions would be as superfluous as references to the colour of his hair in explaining why he chose an apple over a slice of cheesecake. A complete and exhaustive account can be given in terms of his

²⁹ It will of course be the case that bodily needs such as hunger and thirst will impact on what Sipho desires. The charitable construal of the phrase 'psychic make-up' must therefore cover a broad range of mental states such that bodily desires also impact on our description of an agent's decisions on what to do. All that is important to my discussion is to note that a *causal* description of what Sipho decides and does will not include second-order reasons would be claimed by the moral objectivist.

psychic make-up. This account maps onto our phenomenology. It is typically the case that when we choose one item over another, we do so because we feel a greater impulse in favour of that particular item. Our satisfaction is not rationally determined but is rather a function of our strongest desire at that particular moment. The Humean account is not only complete but also compatible with our experience of practical deliberation. If a norm-based account of our action were to be accepted in favour of or added to the Humean model, it would have to show in what respect the Humean model is deficient or underdescribes our experiences of practical deliberation. Specific to my focus on moral beliefs, one would also have to examine whether or not the non-moral examples (e.g. the cheesecake/apple example I use above) maps onto specifically moral beliefs and actions. The salient point here is that, on the face of it, Humean psychology provides a complete and exhaustive account of human action, thereby crowding out a reason-based account of human action³⁰.

It now needs to be shown how a reason-based account of human action provides a viable alternative hypothesis to the Humean model. A reason-based model makes sense of human action with reference to the reasons that an agent chooses for performing a particular action. This account assumes that it is not sufficient to merely know what the desires of an agent are. Rather, we also need to understand what reasons the agent takes herself to have for deciding among the various options. So, for example, when Sipho opts for an apple over cheesecake, it may turn out that the reason he so chooses is that he is worried about being overweight and fears that eating the cheesecake will exacerbate the condition. This explanation not only takes cognisance of the desires of an agent but also locates those desires within the context of rational considerations on the part of the agent³¹. These considerations are 'rational' because they are justifiable independent of the agent's empirical self. It is in the interest of every person who wishes to live a healthy life that they do certain things such as eating a balanced diet. Keeping healthy is an important part of a life worth living. This is true of the general lifestyle a person chooses and will of course not be true of every individual action a person performs. I want to consider individual actions and long-term considerations separately.

³⁰ Harman makes a similar point in "Ethics and Observation" in *Moral Discourse and Practice* (1997) where he argues that assumptions about moral facts are not necessary to explain moral judgments. Moral judgments can be completely explained with reference to the psychology and moral sensibility of the moral agent making the moral observation.

³¹ I elaborate on this model below when I argue that the Humean model is insufficient to account for our phenomenological experiences. I merely state here what the response to this reason-based account would be for the Humean.

First, I want to consider individual actions. I do not think that every single action that an agent performs needs to be rationally defensible. This would detract from the complexity and richness of human experiences. Some actions that we perform may well be nonrational or even irrational if considered in isolation but may not damage our long-term well being. Indeed, it may even be (albeit accidentally) good in the long-term. For example, going on a drunken shebeen cruise and getting alcohol poison in the process is (arguably) an irrational action. However, this may be of no consequence to the well-being of the person in the long-term. Indeed, it may even be the experience that spurs the person on lead a more balanced and healthy life. There are two salient points I want to make with respect to this discussion of individual actions³². First, I am reluctant to commit myself to the dubious suggestion that all our individual actions should be rationally defensible. It is for this reason that I choose an example that is based on long-term considerations of what is in the best interest of an agent. Second, it may well be the case that an exhaustive psychological account at the level of particular actions is available on the Humean model. I doubt that this could the case since normative considerations at the level of particular actions could still, on my model, could still override the empirical desires that would make the action at this level a determined outcome on the Humean model. Furthermore, should the Humean model somehow be able to provide an exhaustive psychological account at the level of particular actions, I would still doubt that it could do so at the level of long-term dispositions towards actions. I now justify this latter claim.

It is in the long-term interest of everyone to live a health life. Whatever particular actions we may perform, the general *pattern* of our life ought to strive to attain a character that reflects such long-term considerations. It is in terms of such a pattern-based assessment of our lives that reason gets a greater grip than the Humean picture allows for. All rational agents want to live a life that is worth living. Given that eating a balanced diet is part of what it means to live well and be healthy, it follows that it is rational for any creature with a reflective capacity to take these considerations into account when deciding what they want to eat. This means that Sipho's empirical desires co-incide with these rational considerations. Given that Sipho himself displays an internal awareness of the rationality of these considerations, it follows that Sipho's decision is in an important respect rationally determined. A Humean response to this

³² I am indebted to Veli Mitova for this interesting extrapolation from my initially brief distinction between (1) particular actions and (2) long-terms dispositions towards action.

model may be as follows. While one cannot deny the experience of deliberating over whether to choose the apple over the cheesecake, this does not show that the reasons which I take myself to have for choosing the apple actually cause me to have the desire to choose the apple or to act on that desire. It is consistent with the Humean claim that our desires cause us to act in particular ways and yet we experience the world as if we have rational control over those deliberative processes. However, that is mere illusion. Reason remains a slave of the passions.

It has already been shown that the Humean model is complete, coherent and appears to map onto our experiences. Is the reason-based model superior? Both models appear to be consistent with our experiences. However, the Humean model is superior in that it is able to account for the appearance that we exercise rational control over our deliberative processes. The reason-based model overdescribes the role that reason plays in determining our desires. Given that the instrumental role of reason as well as the illusory experience of rational self-control is subsumed by the Humean model, it follows that there is no reason to accept the reason-based model. The Humean account of human action crowds out the reason-based model.

This debate mirrors the debate between Malcolm and Dennett in the philosophy of Mind. Dennett argued in **The intentional stance** (1987) that a complete physicalist explanation of action does not preclude a psychological explanation. The two explanations are not competing with each other for the available causal space; it is rather the case that each explanation serves a function not fulfilled by the other. So, for example, the physicalist explanation gives a complete causal account of the behaviour of humans. The psychological account, however, explains the same behaviour in terms of the intentional states of the agent. This can be useful when interacting with people and trying to predict their behaviour. For example, I can ask of Sipho what he intends to do next in a game of chess against me. By ascribing mental states and agency to him, I am better able to calculate what he plans to do than were I to opt for the more laborious route of mapping out his physical make-up and history and make calculations based on that data. This strategy can also be employed against inanimate objects such as chess-playing computers. Again by ascribing mental states and agency to the chess-playing computer I am able to predict its moves more efficiently than if I were to try and uncover the mechanics in terms of which the chess-playing computer is operating. The salient point is that Dennett's dual explanandum theory is akin to the claim that even if Humean psychology does provide a complete causal account of human action, this does not preclude the usefulness of a

norm-based account of human behaviour. The two need merely be differing explanations serving different purposes.

Malcolm's response, developed in "The inconceivability of mechanism", is that Dennett does not take the implications of a complete physicalist metaphysic seriously. If we were able to understand human action completely in physicalist terms, we would be able to predict what a person will do. It is only due to our ignorance that we can't do so. In principle, however, a complete physicalist metaphysic renders a psychological account eliminable. One cannot both claim that a physicalist account is complete *and* maintain that a psychological account is integral to understanding human behaviour. This would be a clear case of causal overdetermination. It follows, according to Malcolm, that a physicalist account crowds out a psychological account.

This is the same move that Mackie makes in claiming that causal explanations in terms of psychology crowd out a norm-based account of human action. The Humean model provides the basis for Mackie's crowding out thesis. The challenge for the objectivist is to show that reason does play a non-instrumental role in practical reason. In other words, it must be shown that in assessing what ends one wishes to pursue, the deliberative process is not just one of discovering the strongest desire that one contingently has. Rather, one can step back from one's desires and rationally assess which desires, including those falling outside one's contingent wants and desires, one ought to pursue. It must then be shown how ends so chosen can have the requisite motivational force to allow for the agent to perform the morally correct action. The rest of this chapter maps out the details of how the objectivist may respond to these challenges.

The challenge presented by the Humean position and developments of it by Williams and Mackie can be summarised as follows. First, insofar as the moral objectivist relies on a 'noumenal' aspect to the self in characterising practical deliberation, she is wrong. Such a conception is simply incoherent and we can best understand our practical agency in terms of an empirical self. Second, moral objectivists overstate the role that reason plays in our practical deliberation. This challenge includes the claims that (i) reason has an instrumental role to play in moral or practical deliberation; (ii) our judgments of others' actions and attitudes are not grounded in reason and (iii) reason-based explanations of human actions are eliminable. It follows that (a) reason can inform us of all the facts and features of a situation

and the best means of attaining ends within that situation; (b) that we can react critically to others' by noting defects in their will or passions but not their rational faculty and (c) that if Mackie's extrapolation of the Humean position is correct, then reason-based explanations of action are crowded out by psychological accounts.

I now develop responses to these challenges by drawing on the work of Nagel and supplementing deficiencies in his account. First I show how rational considerations can be brought to bear on our desires and wants non-instrumentally. The argument that Nagel provides for this contention allows one to develop a response to the Humean claims about the phenomenology of practical deliberation. I show that an empirical conception of the self is not able to make sense of the actual nature of our practical deliberation. Furthermore, a proper examination of our reactive attitudes shows that we are committed to a 'noumenal self'. I then show how a psychological account of our actions is an inadequate characterisation of our actions, thus responding to Mackie's claim that reason-based explanations are crowded out by psychological accounts.

Section 3: The "So what" response³³

One response to the motivation problem is "So what"? Proponents of this response do not think that the objectivist needs to respond to the motivation challenge. Objectivity is restricted to the claim that there are universal moral truths that can be discerned through a rational process. This is all the objectivist needs to claim. It is a further question whether or not moral agents are able to act on these universal truths. Some people will respond appropriately while others will not. Why should we be surprised? After all, if there are moral facts, these will themselves be discerned and understood by only some moral agents. This does not legitimate the worries of anti-objectivists. So, for example, there will be constitutive as well as circumstantial factors that will determine whether or not a particular agent will perform those actions that track the moral facts. One's personality, upbringing, and personal values will determine the likelihood of one's actions mapping onto the moral facts. But the question of what these factors are or which moral agents have them is irrelevant to the more central question of whether or not there are moral facts and, if there are any, how we can apprehend them. When tutoring a group of students a few years ago, for example, all of them displayed

³³ I am indebted to Ward Jones for bringing this response to my attention.

an appreciation for the cogency of arguments that concluded that homosexuality is not immoral. Nonetheless, some of them remained homophobic despite an appreciation of the logical force of these arguments. This suggests a disjunction between what might be objectively considered moral facts and agents' ability to take such facts to heart and act on them. The "So what" response separates these issues. The issue of whether or not there are moral facts, so the argument goes, must not be conflated with the issue of what it means for an agent to be so motivated as to act on the basis of such facts. This is necessarily difficult, given one's personal experiences and societal influence. It is not surprising that many moral agents will fall short of acting on the moral facts. That does not invalidate the objectivist project. The "So what" response concludes that the Humean objection fails to undermine the objectivist project in any fundamental respect. There is no reason why the moral objectivists needs to enter debate on what the correct conception of the self is nor what the exact role of reason is in our moral deliberations and practices. These questions fall outside the scope of the objectivist project.

This is not an adequate response to the Humean challenge. The reasons for its inadequacy show why the motivation problem ought to be taken seriously by the objectivist. Implicit in the "So what" response is the claim that ought does not imply can. In other words, an objective moral theory tells us what we ought to do. Whether we can, in fact, do what we ought to does not matter. So, for example, it might be the case that I have a duty not to lie to the court even though a mad scientist has so wired my brain that I always lie. My incapacity does not exculpate me from being duty bound. The motivation problem is premised on the assumption that what we ought morally to do must be constrained by what we can, in fact, do. The "So what" solution wants to abandon the 'ought implies can' principle. By not engaging the issue of how we can be motivated to act on the moral facts, it thereby distinguishes the issue of what we ought to do from our capacity to do it. On this view, objectivists are concerned with normative claims that are not constrained by the contingent abilities of moral agents. But this is deeply counter-intuitive without adequate justification as to why we should let go of these intuitions. First, it is counter-intuitive because it abandons our ordinary views on this issue for no persuasive reason. When I hold the rapist responsible for his action, I do so not merely because there is a moral and legal injunction against rape. Rather, the very nature of this injunction is that it is premised on what we are capable of doing. The rapist could have acted otherwise, had he so chosen. Moral and legal culpability derive their normative force from considerations of what we can perform. The converse also holds. There

might be exculpatory factors in a given case that reduce or eliminate the moral or legal culpability of a person. No one expects the quadriplegic to run into the burning house and rescue the screaming baby. She could not have performed this action, had she so chosen. In that context, she is not morally duty bound to rescue the child. We restrict our normative requirement to what she can, in fact, perform e.g. screaming for assistance from the neighbours or passers by. This seems like a clear case of how our moral and legal practices are grounded in the principle 'ought implies can'. So it seems clear that in general normative concepts require of us the capacity to perform an action that we can perform, should we choose to do so.

Second, the specific analysis of duties (as opposed to the general character of moral and legal norms) brings to light why 'ought implies can' cannot be abandoned. Duties are categorical whereas many other imperatives are relative to the desires of an agent – the so-called hypothetical imperatives. So if we advise someone to do something and they fail to do so, it may be because they lack the relative desire that will be fulfilled if they performed the action we enjoin them to do. Commanding someone to refrain from drinking beer because it is bad for their health will only have motivational force if they have the desire to be in good health. It is the very nature of duties, on the other hand, that they are injunctions that we must perform and can perform. If we abandon the principle of 'ought implies can', we are committing ourselves to the claim that there might be duties which we ought to fulfil, even if we cannot actually fulfil them. This is *prima facie* incoherent since duties and obligations only have legitimacy within the context of what is possible. The reason that moral agents are accountable for failing to perform a moral duty must be because they could have performed the duty, had they so chosen. If the objectivist wants to retain this common sense understanding of duties as well as the principle 'ought implies can', she needs to take the motivation problem seriously. The objectivist does not just want to show that there are moral facts but also that such moral facts can have the requisite motivational force to result in the performance of the correct moral action. This requires a more substantive response to the issue of what the correct characterisation of practical deliberation is and what the role of reason is in this deliberative process.

Nagel's response

Nagel responds to the Humean challenge very briefly in **A View From Nowhere** (1986: 149-152). He develops a more detailed response in **The Last Word** (1997). He provides two arguments. His first contention is that the Humean position gives an inadequate account of how our wants and desires come about and how they are sustained. His second contention, which I discuss below, is a denial of the claim that normative, reason-based questions are crowded out by the passions. I will presently discuss the first contention. The Humean position starts from the assumption that our wants and desires are a given. At best they are responsive to factors that the agent is not consciously controlling. This extends the Humean position by making it immune to claims of not allowing for dynamic changes in our wants and desires. However, even on such a dynamic characterisation into the Humean position as provided for by Williams, the *sources* of these changes remain nonrational. In other words, the causal processes that result in changes in our desires and want are not rationally determined. So, for example, it may be the case that Sipho's preferences change incrementally between now and later. He has developed a liking for whisky where previously he only consumed beer. Such a change in taste is itself a causal result of certain experiences that Sipho has undergone e.g. having accidentally drunk whisky from a glass he thought was filled with water. The key point is that such changes in taste are a function of experience rather than a function of rational deliberation and direction. The model excludes any significant causal influence that a self-directed rational process of deliberation on the part of the agent may be responsible for. This is precisely where Nagel locates the shortcoming of this Humean characterisation of how wants and desires can come about and be sustained.

By focusing more on the origin of desires and wants, Nagel is able to find a role for reason that is non-instrumental. It is not the case that our wants and desires are more or less a given. Rather our wants and desires (and our preferences in general) can be, and often are, responsive to rational considerations. Consider the battered wife who is madly in love with her abusive husband. She has two competing desires. One desire is to get back with her husband because she still loves him very much. A competing desire is that of wanting to be respected as a human being and being free from physical and emotional abuse. It cannot merely be the case that these are two given desires and that we can assess which one was the

stronger desire once we know what she decided to do. The Humean claim cannot be the unfalsifiable contention that whatever action the woman performs, it is evidence of what the stronger desire was that she held. Such a claim would amount to an *a priori* stipulation that all decisions reached during practical deliberation are merely expressive of the strongest desires an agent experiences at the time that she decides to act. The Humean claim can only avoid being *a priori*, stipulative or unfalsifiable if it gives a richer analysis of why the prototypical instances of deliberation are mere expressions of the strongest desires that an agent has. What Nagel offers in opposition to this Humean claim is a description of what is involved in the deliberative process which makes it clear how rationality can help determine the ends that we wish to pursue. This refutes the Humean contention that reason has merely an instrumental role to play in practical deliberation.

Nagel showed that rational considerations could be brought to bear on one's desires and wants. This insight can be developed further. If only empirical processes impact on my actions, then it is difficult to account for the experience of agential control over one's actions. I no longer do anything. Things happen to me. I will show that this is a consequence of the Humean position and that it is an untenable consequence in light of considerations of our folk conception and experiences of agency.

First, if it is the case that a norm-based explanation of my actions is crowded out by a psychological account, then this also crowds out our concept of agency. I first clarify the notion of agency before showing it to be a disastrous consequence of the crowding out thesis that it obliterates our notion of agency.

'Agency' refers to the agent's experience of being a 'doer' or 'initiator' of events. It is variously used to denote at least the phenomenology of agency but sometimes also the stronger contention that it denotes a metaphysical notion of 'doer'. It may of course be alleged that in order to be an agent one does not need (a) to *experience* oneself as an agent per se and (b) one need not *deliberate* practically in order for one to be an agent³⁴. One is an agent simple in virtue of the fact that one actually performs certain actions intentionally. I accept both (a) and (b). However, despite (a) and (b) it is still correct to recognise the following two features of agency, which is sufficient for the rest of my argument to have force. First, our

³⁴ I am indebted to Veli Mitova for convincing me of the importance of clarifying this notion much more than I initially had.

intentions are *partly* constitutive of our agency. This follows from the fact that agents are agent *qua* the performance of intentional actions. It follows, secondly, that deliberation is *partly* constitutive of our intentions. In other words, unless we are mere wantons, the very facts that we act intentionally means that our self-consciousness sometimes enable us to reflect on and deliberate on our decisions³⁵. The paradigmatic expression of these features of agency is in our phenomenological experiences of us as agents that can deliberate and initiate events in the world. It is this characterisation of agency that I am relying on in order to show that the Humean model must be flawed since it suggests a negation of these constitutive features of agency.

The rest of my argument can now proceed. Inherent in the concept of agency is a norm-based analysis of agency and not a causal psychological one. What it means to be a doer is precisely that one has intentions and reasons for what one decides to do. This falls outside the determinism of the various psychological factors that act on me. What it means for me to be an agent is precisely that I have the capacity to reason about the psychic complexities that partly constitute me and inform my preferences. This is not to deny the influences of the passions. I am merely suggesting that an analysis of agency itself requires an understanding of how we can rule our passions through rational processes. An untenable consequence of the Humean position is that it denies this suggestion. When the sculptor decides to create a statue, she consciously contemplates what figure she wishes to create. She develops the intention to bring about a certain change in the shapeless block of marble in front of her. She then acts on these intentions and starts sculpting until she has moulded it into the statue she intended. This is an act of agency – she formed the intention to perform a certain task, initiated and completed the action. It both feels to her like a process that she is driving and it looks to the outside world like an activity that can be ascribed to her as an agent, a ‘doer’, and not merely a passive focal point of certain events. This is our folk conception and experience of agency. It is integral to understanding ourselves as persons. This folk conception of our practical agency both requires and justifies the ‘two aspects’ conception of the self as developed by Kantians.

There are two points to be noted here. First, the empirical conception of the self is not sufficient to fit the phenomenology of deliberation. Blackburn merely asserts that an active

³⁵ This idea is echoed by Nagel in “Universality and the reflective self” and is amplified later in the chapter.

characterisation of deliberation follows if we allow a conception of practical agency as including the desires and wants of an agent. But it is hard to see what makes this conception 'active' in the sense of allowing us to characterise the agent as being justified in feeling that she has control over the deliberative process. That feeling can only be captured by the notion of a controlling aspect of the self that has a reflective capacity to stand independent of the contingent wants and desires of the agent. Blackburn has to bite the bullet and defend a characterisation of deliberation as being passive. This forces him to claim that our phenomenological experience to the contrary is mere illusion.

Secondly, if we can only make sense of our experience of phenomenology in terms of the 'two aspects' conception then it is not so obvious that the conception of a noumenal self is indeed incoherent. Blackburn contended that the postulation of a 'noumenal' self requires us to think of an aspect of the self that is independent of the contingent set of desires and wants that influence the ends that we choose. The incoherence of a 'noumenal' self was located in the impossibility of positing such a self. But this objection can be defused. It can be conceded that the Humean position does not amount to the claim that we are socially determined to behave in certain ways. A more charitable interpretation of the Humean position would be to see it as allowing for the possibility of various changes in our constitution. This differs from the rationalist picture in that the changes that are possible will be themselves responses to our experiences that bring about changes in our desires. But this flexibility in the Humean position is simply not enough to avoid a deficiency in the model. It will sometimes be the case that our tastes simply change in response to other desires or new experiences that we have. But it would be wrong to characterise all of the changes in our desires as being merely responses to experiences or empirical influences that are not directed by ourselves. The person who changes her lifestyle so as to fit her long-term interests is not just changing her behaviour in response to new desires that she finds herself having. Whilst these desires are of an empirical nature, they can simultaneously be desires that are the result of a process of careful second-order deliberation about the appropriateness of various first-order desires and wants. In assessing these first-order wants, the sources of the deliberation at that moment is the 'noumenal' self. This 'noumenal' self must be postulated in order to explain the consistent success that one can have in bringing such second-order reflection to bear on our first order desires and wants. If we were to retain a wholly empirical conception of the self and account for these changes in the behaviour of an agent in the direction of what could be considered long-term desires that any rational agent should develop, then it would be a matter of moral

luck every time someone gets the fit right. This ignores the frequency of this success and gets the phenomenology of second-order reflection wrong. The process of deliberating about what I ought to do involves a process of reasoning about what preferences I want to satisfy.

This shows that wants and desires do not just causally operate on human agents without reason being involved. Reason has more than just an instrumental role - it is integral in deciding what one takes oneself to have reason to do. Reason is integral to this evaluative process that determines what we do. But in so doing, reason is not merely expressive of a latent decision playing itself out during deliberation *per se*. Rather, the result of the deliberative process remains open until the rational considerations have been fully attended to and subsequently determines the ends that an agent wishes to seek. Such ends are not specifiable before hand even with specialist knowledge of the psychic make-up of the agent. The deliberative process, driven by rational considerations, becomes an active determinant of what the agent will decide to do. The example of the battered wife can be developed to underscore Nagel's analysis. It may well be that the stronger desire that the battered woman has is to return to her abusive husband. However, on reflecting what she should do, she realises the importance of certain factors that weigh against this desire – the importance of self-respect, negating gender stereotypes and learning to be self-sufficient. She comes to recognise, during this deliberative process, that she ought to place greater value on these factors rather than the short-term physical and emotional gains of being back in her relationship. This final decision is a function of assessing what is in her long-term interest and considerations of what counts as factors that make any life worth living. It is important to note that this not just an instrumental role that reason is playing here. If was a solely instrumental role then its influence would stop at the level of considerations about what the best means are of fulfilling a particular desire. A non-instrumental role, as in the case at hand, is one that brings about changes in the *ends* that the agent wishes to pursue. It is the crux of my contention that rational deliberation can and does bring about these types of changes and so it follows that reason can and does play a non-instrumental role in practical deliberation. The key point is that her decision need not be a function of her whims. Rather, rational considerations can be brought to impinge on her decision.

It also seems that although Williams correctly characterises the S as being dynamic, his characterisation cannot be falsified since he simply stipulates that all external reasons that do motivate us must have been latent internal reasons. This is surely not a fair reflection of the

vast number of instances when second-order reflection on an issue can bring about a change in one's first order desires. At least sometimes it must be the case that the rationality of the considerations has the requisite force to bring about a change in one's set of first order desires and wants. It seems that a 'noumenal' conception of self is not only coherent but also crucial to a proper characterisation of our practical agency. To the extent that the Humean position undermines this conception of agency, we have good reason to doubt its tenability.

The Humean model is also unable to account for our reactive attitudes. On the Humean model it is merely the case that I can assess whether or not there are certain defects in the will or passions of another person. But any notion of blame or praise would be considered a primitive practise that rides on our mistaken belief about a 'noumenal' self that can control and direct our various desires and wants and which is itself not susceptible to the empirical, causal influences. We need to recognise that our judgments about the characters and actions of others are not rational judgments. They are judgments about whether or not others fall short of certain (probably socially or functionally) desirable character traits. So we can say of someone that she is a natural disaster or a coward or imprudent but we cannot praise or blame her for her actions or character dispositions. This is at odds with our reactive attitudes.

Strawson shows convincingly in "Freedom and Resentment" (1974) that an integral part of inter-personal relations involves our reactive attitudes towards others. These include personal reactive attitudes, impersonal reactive attitudes and self-reactive attitudes. An example of a personal reactive attitude would be a feeling of resentment towards another person. The key characteristic of these attitudes is that they are derived from demands or expectations we place on others in our inter-personal relations with them. An example of an impersonal reactive attitude would be a feeling of moral disapprobation towards another. The key characteristic of these attitudes is that they are potentially vicarious in the sense of being attitudes that we can have towards someone on behalf of others. They are typically informed by wider social norms and moral rules as opposes to the more localised context of personal reactive attitudes. Self-reactive attitudes are associated with demands that we make on ourselves.

What is important for my purposes is the range of personal and impersonal reactive attitudes. Strawson distinguished between an objective attitude and participant attitude that we can adopt towards someone. We assume in our ordinary interpersonal relations with others that they are capable of displaying and having the appropriate attitudes that we expect of them as

members of the moral community. That is what it means to adopt the participant attitude. The humanity of our interpersonal relationships finds expression in this attitude. When there are various exculpatory conditions at work, we suspend our assumption that another is a member of the moral community and adopt the objective attitude. They become objects of social policy. Examples would be instances when someone is psychologically abnormal, for example, someone who is diagnosed with a severe mental disorder, or someone who is morally undeveloped such as a child. Of course, there will sometimes be instances where we excuse someone for their actions ('She did not intend to do this' or 'She could not avoid doing that') even though we do not suspend our participant attitude towards them. This participant attitude that we adopt towards one another is a recognition of our moral agency. Strawson makes the central point that we cannot give up these reactive attitudes because they are so integral to the web of human relations. He states that:

The human commitment to participation in ordinary inter-personal relationships is, I think, too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change the world that, in it, there were no longer any such thing as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them... [i.e.] being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question (1974: 11).

Our reactive attitudes display a commitment to a 'noumenal' self that enables us to be justified in reacting to others or ourselves in certain ways. Moral disapprobation, for example, is a justified reaction in those instances where a member of the moral community failed to act in accordance with his better judgments. But the very reason why we do not view that person as merely being an object of social policy is precisely because we do not view it as a matter of constitutive bad luck that she failed to behave appropriately. Our reactive attitude is premised on the stronger conviction that she failed to let the 'noumenal' aspect of herself direct her actions and attitude. Were we to restrict ourselves to a conception of the self as empirical it becomes difficult to hold on to our range of reactive attitudes. This follows from the fact that most of the reactive attitudes such as moral approbation or moral indignation would then become inappropriate. It would not be the result of some self-directed process on the part of the agent that would be the cause of her attitudes and actions. We would have to adopt the objective stance permanently and in so doing endorse the view that abnormality – in the sense of being compelled to adopt the objective attitude at all times – is a universal human

condition. We can only make sense of, and accept, the centrality of our reactive attitudes to our humanity if we accept the 'two aspects' conception of the self that Hume rejects.

Nagel's second argument denies that normative, reason-based questions are crowded out by the passions. (Recall that the first argument, discussed above, showed that the Humean position gives an inadequate account of how our wants and desires come about and how they are sustained). This is a direct response to Mackie's claim to the contrary. It is essentially a more explicit formulation of the first argument's contention that reason is central to practical deliberation. A psychological account leaves out the reasons for the actions of an agent. But one can always ask whether or not there are any rational considerations for acting on the basis of a particular desire. Even if one recognises oneself to have various desires, one still needs to decide what to do. Practical reason is a conscious process of deliberation. Mere recognition of various passions is not enough for practical reasoning to be completed. The agent still has to decide what justificatory weight to give to her respective desires. In other words, there is a gap between what I am inclined to do and my actual decision about what to do. Mere recognition of my various desires is not sufficient to yield a decision of what to do. A process of rational deliberation fills this gap by enabling me to assess which desires to act on. The final outcome of this deliberative process is the action that I take myself to have reasons to perform. It is not sufficient to analyse this process without appreciating the centrality of reason in the process.

It is precisely because reason is central to this deliberative process that agents become susceptible to judgments of justification for the decisions they have made³⁶. I can demand a justification of the battered wife as to why she had decided not to return to her husband. She would be in a position to cite supporting reasons precisely because her decision was in centrally a function of certain rational considerations. This is what distinguishes her as a moral and doxastic agent from non-persons. The salient point is that the attempt to relegate reason in making sense of practical deliberation or moral reasoning simply fails. There is an intimate connection between desires, actions and reasons. Reason is not merely instrumental but central in deciding what to do and thus in informing my preferences. Preferences thus formed motivate me to act in accordance with what actions I take myself to have reasons to

³⁶ The notion of susceptibility to a judgment of justification that I make use of here with respect to moral actions is based on a similar use of the notion in the realm of beliefs, as developed by Ward Jones in "Our accountability for believing".

perform. A person who reflects on the weight of the evidence in favour of some particular moral fact can come to see that she has reason to act in accordance with this evidence. The racist who has been presented with evidence that negates the reasons that she took herself to have for holding the racist belief can now recognise that that belief fails to match the available evidence. The sources of this evidence may vary. For example, if the agent changes her racist belief after taking an hallucinogenic drug, then it is not accurate to think of such change as being responsive to a moral fact. Such non-moral facts may bring about changes in the beliefs of the moral agent that happen to then be aligned with the actual moral facts. My argument simply relies on the fact that moral facts are *one* species of evidence that could also bring about changes in the beliefs, attitudes and actions of an agent. (So, for example, the moral argument that Singer give in **Practical Ethics** against racism is the type of evidence that my discussion hinges on). Moral arguments can also impact our belief systems during deliberation. Such a process of deliberation effectively cultivates the correct beliefs in accordance with the moral facts. Over time she could change her actions and attitudes to reflect this intellectual conviction. Of course, such success hardly ever occurs automatically³⁷. The agent may, for example, have a motivated belief. There may be other possible exculpatory factors such as the social context within which these beliefs are cultivated and sustained. I do not wish to take up these considerations in this dissertation. They require an examination of the applications and implications that moral objectivity has for moral and doxastic responsibility. The relevant point here is simply that it is *possible* for moral agents to develop preferences (and, based on these, actions) such that they fit the available moral facts. This is sufficient to deny the objection that reason lacks motivational force.

These arguments cohere with Nagel's general exposition of what it means for one to step back from one's subjective position in the world. The Humean description of my preferences remains true at a first order level. Many of our wants and desires are given and do not admit of any further evaluation. My liking for tea over coffee would be of this type. However, at a higher order level we can reflect on, and evaluate, these first order level desires and preferences. The fact that I like pizza does not give rise to a second order evaluative question about the rationality of this preference. It is simply a fact about me. Other preferences are susceptible to higher order level evaluation. Consider one's political allegiance. One's support of a particular political party is unlike one's liking for pizza in that it admits of a second order

³⁷ We often fail to take our intellectual conviction to heart. This fact about human beings is explored fully by Jennifer Church in "Taking it to Heart: What Choice Do We Have?"

level evaluation. Questions can be posed as to why one made *that* choice of allegiance. I can ask at the second order level whether or not I have good reasons for my political allegiance. The salient point is that reason can influence our preferences and, by so doing, motivate us to act.

In “Universality and the reflective self”, Nagel offers a more precise discussion of what the source of this second-order reflection is. He argues that it is the character of human consciousness that is the source of what makes normative requirements possible. In other words, when we reflect on an issue, such a process brings to our attention data and considerations about an issue that we had not previously attended to. We are then forced to take such data into consideration in deciding what to do. It is not possible for the reflective self to be a passive observer of the beliefs and actions of the non-reflective self³⁸. Even the wanton, says Nagel, has to decide whether or not to *resist* her passions. It is a constitutive fact about us that the reflective self is an active part of our decision-making. In other words, our capacity for self-consciousness makes us aware of our personal point of view (our empirical self) as well as the way things actually are (the moral facts that exert normative pressure against us). This reflection is precisely what the detached point of view – the view from nowhere – consists in: it is the capacity to stop thinking of what *I* should do in a given situation and ask, instead, what *anyone* should do in a given situation³⁹. In answering that question I am forced to attend to the moral facts, which have a general character, rather than being agent-relative in their application. It follows that in our practical deliberation we cannot escape second-order reflection.

These arguments can be developed further. Nagel showed that one could step back from one’s subjective position in the world and adopt an evaluative stance towards first order preferences. Even if my wants and desires influence what actions I perform, I am still forced to decide whether or not I want to identify myself with those wants and desires. It is at this juncture that rational considerations can be brought to bear on how I identify myself in spite of certain causal processes acting on me. The difference between a willing and an unwilling

³⁸ Note how the distinction between non-reflective self and reflective self maps onto the distinction between the empirical self and noumenal self as elucidated in the earlier part of this chapter. It follows that Nagel’s defence of the role of the reflective self is further reason to accept the noumenal conception of the self.

³⁹ This is the difference between Nagel and Korsgaard’s accounts of the source of normativity. While they both agree that we have a reflective capacity because our self-consciousness, Korsgaard argues in “The origin of value and the scope of obligation” that egoism is compatible with reflective value. The ‘view from nowhere’ that Nagel offers denies that such a compatibilism is possible.

addict is that the former chooses to identify with his actions, whilst the latter is a hapless victim of her own addiction. Through rational deliberation the willing addict can come to appreciate the destructiveness of her behaviour. The unwilling addict is at least responsible for failing to perform this second order evaluation of her desires⁴⁰. This shows that even if certain psychological factors operate on us or through us, there is still a locus of responsibility for what we do qua rational second order reflection. This will have implications for moral and doxastic responsibility. The salient point here is simply that rationality cannot be crowded out even where some determinant forces are acting on us, since there is a level at which rational deliberation can and must be invoked in assessing our self-identity. At this level, moral and doxastic agents may turn out to be culpable for not acting or believing in accordance with the moral facts. It follows that an understanding of the reason-action-desire model allows the moral objectives to adequately counter the motivation challenge.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the moral objectivist needs to show that moral facts can motivate us to act. If this is not the case, then the moral objectivist has to argue for moral duties which we might not be capable of performing. This will have undesirable implications for moral and doxastic responsibility. In order to avoid these consequences, it has been shown that even on the best formulation of the motivation challenge, the moral objectivist is able to respond. The motivation challenge finds a classic expression in the work of Hume and had been further developed by such writers as Mackie and Williams. This chapter focused on the Humean model that pertains to the phenomenology of practical deliberation as well as the role of reason in practical deliberation. It has been shown that rationality has an integral role to play in the determination of the ends that motivate us to act. The 'two aspects' model of the self was defended in making sense of how the moral agent can bring about changes in her wants and desires through a self-directed second-order deliberative process. This is the locus of the structure that justifies our normative moral concepts and our ordinary reactive attitude. It follows that moral facts can motivate moral agents to act morally.

⁴⁰ Frankfurt develops this idea further in his classic paper, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person".

Chapter 4

A positive account of moral objectivity

Introduction

In this chapter I develop a positive account of the claim that there are objective moral facts. Part A of the chapter provides an explication and defence of this claim. The claim is premised on three essential features of moral facts. These are that (a) moral facts are universal moral truths and vice versa; (b) moral facts are properties in objects/actions that have the power to cause certain responses in moral agents and (c) the properties that enable objects/actions to have the disposition to cause these responses in moral agents are real properties in the sense that they persist whether or not they are being intuited by moral agents⁴¹. By defending these three features of moral facts, I will be arguing that a synthesis of various versions of objectivity is both possible and desirable since it provides us with an overall positive account that meets the ontological, epistemological and motivational challenges. It also allows us to account for our moral phenomenology and moral disagreement. The three theories that I draw on have traditionally been seen as competing accounts of moral objectivity. These theories correspond to each of the three features of moral objectivity that I defend in Part A.

The first theory can be called weak objectivity. It states that moral facts just are universal moral truths that can be discerned rationally. An essential feature of moral realism is the requirement of being able to discern moral facts through the faculty of rationality. This allows me to argue that the motivation for talking about universal moral truths as opposed to moral facts falls away once the two competing accounts are examined. I still separate them as distinctive features of moral objectivity because they connote different (though compatible) aspects of moral objectivity.

The second theory is secondary-property realism. This theory claims that the nature of moral facts can be understood as being modelled on the primary/secondary property distinction that is a development of Locke's original formulation of the distinction. I draw on McDowell to make sense of the claim that the moral property of an object refers to its predisposition to

⁴¹ The positive account that I develop in this chapter is similar to the Platonic account of mathematics that Brown develops in Chapter 2 of *Philosophy of Mathematics*.

cause us to have certain sorts of characteristic responses. This theory contributes towards an understanding of our attitudinal responses to issues of morality. Whilst the first feature elucidates the epistemology of moral objectivity (and lays the foundation for understanding its ontology), the second feature elucidates how we intuit moral facts.

The third theory can be called strong realism. It claims that the moral properties of an object are those properties that *enable* the object to cause in us certain characteristic responses. I argue that Dancy erroneously uses this argument to dismiss secondary-property realism as not being a version of moral realism at all. It is better to supplement McDowell's account with strong realism by arguing that there are real, persisting properties that enable us to have moral experiences that can be understood as being modelled on the primary/secondary property distinction. Strong moral realism is an essential feature of moral objectivity since McDowell's model could be seen as projectivist and hence falling short of a robust conception of moral objectivity. I submit that the three features that I argue for, jointly provide a positive account of moral objectivity.

Part B of this chapter develops an example of a moral fact. I contend that the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) as argued for by Gewirth is a universal moral truth. I give an exposition and defence of the argument, showing that it establishes a principle that all moral agents have to accept and claim rights to for both themselves and others. I end the chapter by showing how this universal moral truth maps onto the three features of moral objectivity that are argued for in the first part of the chapter. This allows the PGC to be construed not just as a universal moral truth but also as a moral fact. It must be noted, however, that Gewirth's use of the PGC is different to my construal of the principle. Gewirth uses the PGC as an example of a universal moral truth and not as a moral fact as such. It is my contention that the PGC is not just a universal moral truth, even if that might have been Gewirth's intention. I thus depart from Gewirth's position by arguing that the PGC should be more strongly interpreted as a moral fact since it satisfies all three of the essential features of moral facts that I defend in Part A of this chapter.

Part A: The three essential features of moral objectivity

Section 1: Weak objectivity

This conception of moral objectivity states that moral facts are objective in the sense that rational procedures can be used to justify the status of objectivity conferred on certain moral judgments. The procedural element is central to this version of objectivity. Moral facts are justified through certain procedures. Social contract theorists endorse this type of moral realism. On the social contract model, for example, one can explain the rationality of not killing other people arbitrarily along procedural contractarian lines. The rationality of this norm is derived from considerations of what it is necessary for me to do in order to avoid others killing me. I have to refrain from killing others. This is premised on mutual trust and mutual commitment to undertake to give up a certain degree of my freedom in order to enjoy a more substantive degree of freedom. This is a rational procedure for establishing and justifying certain social norms that govern the relations of our lives. On this theory, social norms are a function of the rational procedure that contractarians postulate as the mechanism through which moral concepts are established.

It also explains what motivates one to follow these norms – one does so in order to ensure the likelihood of others also obeying them. If I fail to follow these norms, this will act as a disincentive for others to follow them and so undermine the purpose and cohesion of the system of norms as a whole. It is thus easy to make sense of the motivational force of such norms on this procedural model.

Weak objectivity is also able to avoid any ontological problems. The moral facts that govern societal relations are not part of the fabric of the universe and therefore susceptible to the charge that it postulates a queer ontology. Moral facts are simply societal norms that are explicitly or implicitly agreed to by the members of a society as preconditions for ensuring the mutual enjoyment of various freedoms. We are able to discern these moral facts rationally through intersubjective dialogue between the members of a community. The rationality of specific moral facts can be discerned relative to the function that they serve in this social context. The motivation to respect these moral facts and act on them is derived from the mutual assurance that other members of your community will similarly obey these moral facts, even if they do so for egoistic reasons. The salient point is that weak conceptions of

objectivity share the commonality of avoiding the ontological queerness that seems to appear when the stronger claim is made that moral predicates are the property of things in the world. They are part of the fabric of the universe.

Rachels (1998: 10) claims that the problem with weak objectivity is that it does not fit our moral phenomenology. Moral phenomenology refers to our moral practices and our moral thinking. As Rachels intimates, a good ethical theory should not be “... radically incompatible with our ordinary sense of what we are doing when we make moral judgments” (1998: 10). Weak objectivity does not express what we mean when we make such judgments as “slavery is wrong” or “murder is wrong”. When we express such moral judgments, we take ourselves to be conveying moral facts that are true independent of our feelings connected with the issue. Such is the phenomenology of moral judgments. Weak objectivity must either deny that that is a correct characterisation of what is involved in the expression of moral judgments or it needs to show that we are mistaken in taking ourselves to be expressing moral facts that are true independent of certain subjective or intersubjective feelings connected to the issue. It cannot persuasively make the former claim. It is clear from our moral practises that as moral agents we do take ourselves to be expressing moral facts when we make moral judgments. We do not, for example, take ourselves to be merely expressing injunctions that are a set of social conventions arrived at through the explicit or tacit acceptance of a social contract. This would be underdescribing the phenomenology of moral judgements.

The only possible response is for weak objectivity to subsume the claim that we are wrong to take ourselves to be expressing moral facts. On such a view our current moral thinking and practices are simply mistaken. Rather than searching for a moral theory that fits this faulty moral phenomenology, we ought to change what we take ourselves to be expressing when we make moral judgments. Unless we do so, we will remain tempted to develop a theory of objectivity that supports our faulty assumption that there are moral facts that are part of the fabric of the universe.

Rachels’ objection against weak objectivity can be easily defused. He assumes that because weak objectivity talks about universal moral truths that such a characterisation of moral facts preclude what we take ourselves to be expressing when we make moral judgments. This misunderstands the scope of the claim that moral objectivity argues for ‘universal moral truths’. Take the universal moral truth that slavery is wrong. Such universals are truths that we

become aware of through the faculty of rationality. The justification for the moral claim that slavery is wrong is based on both normative – rational – considerations as well as descriptive – positive - facts about human beings and human society. An example of a positive fact about human beings that counts against torture is the fact that we do not (ordinarily) derive any pleasure from pain. Thus torture ignores this descriptive (physiological and psychological) fact about us. Normative aspects of assessing the moral acceptability of slavery would include the following. One would have to develop of a rigorous concept of the nature of slavery. Such a concept would be an important benchmark for assessing how slavery related to the noncognitive facts about human beings such as facts about what it is that can diminish our self-worth. One might also have to develop a thick account of what makes any existence meaningful. While such an account will of course take into account empirical facts about human beings it will also involve normative claims about what sorts of lives we should have. Whatever the details of such a conception of meaningful existence might be, it will again provide with a set of rational consideration for judging the moral acceptability of acts of slavery. What this shows is that both normative/rational considerations as well as positive/empirical facts about human beings and human societies will determine the moral facts that we discern. The generality of such facts give them their universal character.

The crucial point is that the faculty of rationality is integral to the discernment of such universal norms. Their status as ‘moral truths’ is derived from the justificatory force of the argument(s) that establish the existence of the universal truth. Talk about ‘universal moral truths’ does not crowd out what it is that we take ourselves to be conveying when we make moral judgments i.e. referring to real properties of objects/actions. When I express the universal moral truth that slavery is wrong, I can still take it to be a real property about the act of slavery that it is morally wrong.

The moral phenomenology at play here might not be fully captured by the phrase ‘universal moral truth’ but the phrase is importantly also not at odds with our moral phenomenology. So Rachels would be correct in claiming that a complete account of moral objectivity must include a richer characterisation of moral phenomenology. The second and third features of moral objectivity that I develop below fill this lacuna. This worry does not justify the conclusion that weak objectivity does not illuminate *some* essential aspect of moral objectivity. It is therefore a necessary though not sufficient part of understanding moral objectivity. The advantage of characterising moral objectivity as consisting in universal moral

truths is that this signals the essentially epistemological character of moral objectivity i.e. that objective moral facts are intuited rationally⁴². It is for this reason that I do not find it contradictory to talk of universal moral truths and moral facts as if they are synonymous. All universal moral truths are moral facts and vice versa. The traditional distinction that is drawn between these two phrases stems from the mistake of thinking that they are competing or alternative accounts of moral objectivity. This temptation falls away once it is realised that they convey different but equally essential aspects of moral objectivity. It is therefore useful to say that an important feature of moral objectivity is that it postulates the existence of universal moral truths that are rationally discernable. The other two features of moral objectivity that I will presently discuss are intended to highlight further essential features of moral objectivity.

Section 2: secondary-property realism

While weak moral objectivity highlights the epistemology of discerning moral facts, it fails to highlight two further essential features of moral objectivity. The first is that of making explicit what is involved in the apprehension of moral facts. This section elaborates on this feature of moral objectivity. In the next section I highlight a further feature – strong moral realism – that completes the account of our moral phenomenology.

Moral realism claims that there are moral facts in the universe. They are properties that could be ascribed to things in the world. This is a much stronger claim than weak objectivity because it makes an explicit ontological claim about the existence of such properties. Given that moral judgments are *prima facie* unlike other judgments about things in the universe – chairs, tables, trees - this immediately makes strong objectivity susceptible to the charge that it is fraught with queer metaphysical properties. On the other hand, should the strong

⁴² Some may claim that moral facts might also be intuited through perception or intuition. I do not consider these to be serious alternatives to rationality. It is vague and mysterious to suggest that we simply perceive moral facts the way we perceive ordinary objects in the world. This model gives weight to Mackie's worry about a queer ontology, in that it suggests the existence of moral facts as properties in the world, to be perceived by us. Rationality allows us to make sense of moral facts as essentially intellectual properties, not unlike mathematical truths in that regard. It is also vague to suggest that we simply intuit moral facts. What if different people intuit different moral facts? What is the source of such intuitions? When we bring moral facts into the realm of rationality, however, we can understand them as being grounded in rationality and being generated, through a reflective process, by the faculty of reason. The vagueness and mysteriousness of the nature and source of moral facts disappear.

objectivist succeed in defending herself from this ontological challenge, she would have developed an objectivist theory that does fit our moral phenomenology, unlike weak objective ethical theories such as social contract theories. I draw on two realist theories – in this section I discuss secondary - property realism and in the next section I draw on strong moral realism, which further builds on my model of moral objectivity and provides a rigorous account of our moral phenomenology.

Secondary-property realism states that moral properties are secondary properties in the sense in which Locke distinguished primary properties from secondary properties. This is a controversial distinction, particularly with respect to whether or not such properties as colour are primary or secondary. I do not intend to enter the complexities of this debate in order to draw on it for my exposition of moral realism. I will work with the following understanding of this distinction. Primary properties are those properties that things possess which do not depend on their being so perceived by creatures with certain types of perceptual apparatus. In other words, they possess these properties even if there are no observers around. So, for example, the mass and shape of an object are primary properties. Secondary properties, on the other hand, refer to the "...powers that objects have to produce effects in the consciousness of observers" (McDowell, 1998: 15). The classic if disputed example of a secondary property is colour. The colour of an object is that visual experience that an object causes one to have when it reflects light rays in a particular way. If my perceptual apparatus were different or the object reflected the light rays differently it would cause me to have a different visual experience of the object. The object would then be said to have a different colour. This is why it is not a primary property. Secondary-property realism claims that moral properties are of this secondary kind. Take, for instance, the moral property of evil. On this view of moral realism, Sipho's moral observation that murder is evil can be explained fully if we take the property of 'evil' to be a secondary property. It is simply that property of an act of murder that causes Sipho to have a certain sort of moral experience i.e. that of reacting with intense disapprobation to the act. Similarly to say of someone that her heroism was morally courageous is to denote the fact of her moral action causing one to have a certain sort of favourable reaction to her actions.

An important virtue of secondary-property realism is that it captures an important part of our moral phenomenology. When I make moral judgments, my judgments are not just expressions of rationally defensible universal moral truths. They are simultaneously expressions of my

attitude towards a particular object⁴³. This is the sense in which I argued in chapter two that moral language has both an expressive as well as a cognitive function. The cognitive function is expressed through the characterisation of moral facts as universal moral truths. The expressive function of moral facts is captured by characterising moral facts as also eliciting certain sorts of attitudinal responses in us. Secondary-property realism uses the model of secondary quality properties in general to articulate the phenomenology of making moral judgments. So, for example, when I make the moral observation that murder is wrong this elicits in me a certain distinct feeling of disapprobation. There are two points to be noted here. First, this feeling of disapprobation is in the first instance an expression of my reactive attitudes towards the moral agent who committed the murder. This is an affirmation of Strawson's articulation of the centrality of such reactive attitudes in our web of interpersonal relations. It is precisely the reason why we ordinarily adopt the participant stance towards one another unless we have reasons to lessen the applications of normative constraints on another. In the ordinary case, therefore, I would be making a judgment about the failure of an agent to exercise the appropriate second-order reflection through the noumenal aspect of her self. Secondly, and more important here, this distinctly phenomenal aspect of making moral judgments is different to the question about the rationality of the judgment i.e. the justificatory status of the judgment. By conceiving of moral facts as being similar to secondary properties such as colour enables us to give rigour to the fact that certain properties about an act elicit certain reactions in me as a moral agent. I conclude that the second essential feature of moral objectivity is that moral facts that have the characteristic effect of eliciting certain phenomenal responses in moral agents, which could best be modelled on the secondary properties of ordinary objects such as their colour.

Jonathan Dancy calls secondary-property realism weak realism. He defines it in opposition to strong realism. He argues that weak realism is not a form of realism at all because it is at odds with the main general argument for realism i.e. the argument from phenomenology (1998: 231-244). He further argues that weak realism collapses into strong realism once an important implicit premise of weak realism is made explicit. Although he does not provide a detailed exposition and defence of strong realism, his argument does conclude that weak realism is not

⁴³ Emotivism has a similar ability to make sense of our moral phenomenology and that explains part of its attraction for those who subscribe to its tenets. This section is particularly important because it shows why a theory – like subjectivism – that can make sense of how our attitudinal responses come about is not sufficient to capture the entirety of our moral phenomenology. It is for this reason that I develop secondary property realism as a necessary but individually insufficient condition for making sense of moral objectivity.

an adequate version of moral realism for making sense of the commitments of moral objectivity. It is for this reason that Dancy rejects McDowell's exposition and defence of secondary-property realism. In this section I will examine Dancy's argument against secondary-property realism. I will argue that his general attack against secondary-property realism cannot be sustained as he misconstrues the *status* of the analogy between moral facts and secondary properties as intended and used by McDowell. I therefore disagree with his contention that we cannot understand moral facts as having the capacity to elicit certain characteristic responses in moral agents. However, I agree with the last part of Dancy's argument which shows that weak realism necessarily depends on some defence of strong realism. The contention is that the postulation of real properties is crucial so as to make sense of how it is that moral facts could have certain dispositional traits. This allows one to characterise moral facts as being real properties that persist independently of the experiences of moral agents. This gives a robust sense of what we take ourselves to be conveying when making moral judgments i.e. pointing to the existence of such properties. I conclude that this does not show that we must abandon secondary-property realism. It rather shows that secondary-property realism can be supplemented with the postulation of real properties that allows us to further develop an overall account of moral objectivity that captures our moral phenomenology *fully*.

Dancy's main thesis is that weak realism cannot make sense of what it means to experience moral properties. More specifically, if secondary-property realism is to be taken seriously, it must show how we can know that we are experiencing the property of being a disposition to cause ϕ . In other words, if moral properties are real and such properties are to be understood as secondary properties, then we must make sense of what it means to experience such secondary properties. Dancy denies that this is possible and this allows him to conclude that weak realism does not fit our moral phenomenology. There are two possible ways of making sense of how it might be possible to experience such secondary properties. First it might be the case that our experience *resembles* the secondary property. Second, it might be the case that our experience is *identical* with the secondary property. I will examine Dancy's arguments against each in turn.

It may be the case that when I experience a moral property my experience of that property resembles the disposition that that property has to cause in me a particular phenomenological experience. So, for example, part of what it means to intuit that evil is a property of murder, is

that my experience resembles the disposition of that moral fact to cause in me a certain characteristic response. Dancy highlights two problems with this characterisation of how we can apprehend moral facts as secondary properties. Firstly, the very possibility of experiencing a disposition is unintelligible. We can make sense of experiencing the effect of the disposition but it is not clear what it would be like to experience the disposition to cause a certain characteristic response in us. Secondly, it is also not helpful to follow Locke in conceiving of primary properties as being able to resemble phenomenal properties. On this model we are to understand moral properties as primary properties of a thing that can resemble purely phenomenal properties. These properties would be incoherent and could not exist. Such properties would simply be impossible since they would have to be objective, independent properties *and* simultaneously resembling our experience of them in purely phenomenal respects. So it does not seem that we can make sense of the experience of moral facts as secondary properties if we understand our experience to *resemble* the secondary-property feature of moral facts.

Alternatively we could conceive of the experience of moral facts as being *identical* with the power of moral facts to elicit a certain characteristic response in the moral agent. (For convenience I will call this the 'identity' argument). On this view of secondary properties, secondary properties are those properties that are *represented* to us as distinctively phenomenal. In other words, the experience of the secondary property is intrinsically representational. This prompts a reformulation of the challenge that weak realism faces in making sense of our experience of moral properties. Under what conditions can a dispositional property be the content of an experience that it causes? Dancy discusses two ways in which we could experience dispositions in that manner. He concludes that if colour is understood to be a secondary property we could make sense of the experience of colour as something which is in the object only as a disposition. But this is disanalogous with moral properties. This part of Dancy's argument also has two parts, which I will examine in turn.

There are two ways in which we could experience the dispositions⁴⁴ that are caused by moral facts. First it might be the case that we actually have the perceptual experience which the disposition is a disposition to elicit. The case of colour would fit this description very easily. In experiencing red, say, the content of the experience (seeing red) just is identical with

⁴⁴ The rest of this section refers to the 'identity' argument and not the 'resemblance' argument unless, stated otherwise.

experiencing the disposition of that thing to cause me to have the visual experience of seeing red. However, what is crucial in recognising the colour of an object is being able to recognise the colour under normal circumstances. In abnormal cases such as bad light, I am often still able to know what the colour of the object would be under normal circumstances. In these instances, I am inferring from all my previous experience of colour under normal circumstances. Moral properties are importantly dissimilar in this respect. We are never in ideal circumstances⁴⁵ to know what the moral property is that we are intuiting. We also do not experience such ideal circumstances sufficiently often in order to be able to make inferences about moral properties that are based on previous experience.

It might alternatively be the case that we experience the unactualised disposition of a moral property to cause a characteristic response. This would be akin to running one's fingers along the edge of a knife and inferring that it is sharp without actually experiencing the effect of that sharpness. Moral properties are again dissimilar in an important respect. In the instance of the knife, my inference is based on previous experience of the knife and is grounded in an empirical correlation between the sharpness of the knife and the feeling that I experience when I run my fingers along its edge. This is dissimilar to moral properties whose existence could not be inferred on the basis of empirical correlations since we are seldom in ideal circumstances which could generate such empirical evidence. It follows that we are unable to account for what the experience of moral properties as secondary properties involves and so cannot rely on the phenomenological argument that gives moral realism its main thrust. It follows that weak realism does not fit our moral phenomenology and so fails to provide an adequate characterisation of the commitments of moral objectivity.

However, Dancy's argument is based on an important misconstrual of the *status* of the secondary-property model as it is relied on by McDowell. McDowell explicitly states that the distinction between primary and secondary properties merely provides a model for making sense of the nature of moral properties. In other words, it is not intended to be making the claim that moral properties are essentially secondary properties in a Lockean sense. Indeed, McDowell points out that there are important dissimilarities between such secondary properties as colour and that of moral properties. We make use of our sensory perceptual apparatus in order to discern such properties as colour. On the other hand, we make use of an

⁴⁵ 'Ideal circumstances' refer to both an ideal environment as well as an ideal observer.

essentially rational faculty in order to grasp moral facts. It would simply be wrong to think of our apprehension of moral facts as fitting directly onto the perceptual model that we use to discern other facts about the world. McDowell states that:

The perceptual model is no more than a model: perception, strictly so called, does not mirror the role of reason in evaluative thinking, which seems to require us to regard the apprehension of value as an intellectual rather than a merely sensory matter...the [secondary-property] model itself ensures that there is nothing useful to say about how such a [intellectual] faculty might work, or why its deliverance might count as knowledge (1998: 211).

These remarks clearly show that McDowell is not committed to showing precisely how we can make sense of the primary/secondary property distinction in general terms. He does not need to show how it is possible to experience the property of being a *disposition* to cause certain characteristic responses. Such a defence is necessary for someone who in general accepts the primary/secondary distinction in its entirety. McDowell can agree (indeed should agree) that it seems incoherent to talk about experiencing dispositions as such. All that he does, and needs to, take from the primary/secondary property distinction is that there is an essentially phenomenal aspect to perceiving moral properties which mimic the nature of general secondary properties. This is true even if one (correctly) concedes that one could not perceive the *disposition* that such an object has to cause one to have that particular phenomenal experience. Put differently, McDowell's argument relies on the *effect* of the dispositional property rather than being committed to making sense of how we could experience the actual dispositional property. Dancy's argument wrongly assumes that McDowell is committed to showing how we could experience the actual disposition. Once one realises that this is not the case, it allows one to accept secondary-property realism as contributing a second essential feature to a positive model of moral objectivity. It shows that moral facts have the power to elicit certain characteristics responses in moral agents.

One objection needs to be dealt with here, which expresses a concern that many moral objectivists have with secondary-property realism. The perceptual experiences of different moral agents might well be different. After all, it is at least possible that my visual experience of seeing red is different to your experience of seeing red. So while we both denote our experiences with the label 'red' it may well be the case that the content of our visual experiences differ. In that case it seems that secondary-property realism is no different to a subjectivist account of ethics. If a secondary property of a thing has an essentially

phenomenal quality, then there can be no guarantee that the content of my phenomenal experience will be identical with your phenomenal experience. Secondary-property realism therefore lends itself to intractable divergences in moral perceptions. Moral objectivity is precisely the opposite thesis i.e. that the content of moral properties is not dependent on what the phenomenal experience of a particular moral agent is like. So it follows that secondary-property realism is a poor model for explaining what moral objectivists are committing themselves to.

I do not think that this objection holds much sway. Far from showing how secondary-property realism undermines moral objectivity, this objection lays the foundation for explaining a further advantage of secondary-property realism. It is, of course, the case that we sometimes perceive things differently. This will hold not just in ordinary perceptual experiences but also in the realm of morality. What this illustrates is that the secondary-property realism gives us one possible understanding for making sense of moral disagreement. The source of moral disagreement on this model is precisely the fact that we do sometimes perceive moral matters differently. But this does not undermine moral objectivity nor provide us with reasons to reject secondary-quality realism as an essential feature of moral objectivity. Such disagreement can be settled without abandoning the model of secondary-property realism. The objections need to show that such moral differences are intractable. But they are not⁴⁶. Differences in the way in which we perceive certain moral facts is a function of various factors such as prejudice, ignorance, motivated beliefs, logical errors in reasoning, etc. These are the types of reasons that explain many instances of differing moral attitudes. None of this is incompatible with recognising the general feature about moral facts that they elicit certain responses in moral agents. The question of what the appropriate response is in any particular instance will be a function of rational considerations about that particular instance. So, for example, if one person has an approbatory attitudinal response towards slavery while someone else has a disapprobatory response, this cannot be said to be an intractable difference in their moral attitudes. Given the independent justification for the PGC below, it will be the case that the moral agent who has the disapprobatory attitude has the appropriate moral response to slavery. This means that secondary-property realism does not collapse into subjectivism or projectionism. It simply means that some moral perceptions will be wrong because they are not adequately informed and determined by certain rational considerations.

⁴⁶ Chapter two showed in greater detail how moral disagreement could be settled through rational discourse.

This is no different to sometimes being mistaken about the taste of a particular piece of food. It is particularly for this reason that I included as the first essential feature of my model of moral objectivity that a necessary criterion for something to be a moral fact is that it must be a universal moral truth. So something will not count as a moral fact simply because it elicits *some* response in the moral agent. The appropriateness of the response will in turn depend on whether or not it tracks a universal moral truth.

Section 3: Strong moral realism

Secondary-property realism adds to the model of moral objectivity by making sense of the expressive feature of moral language. However, part of our moral phenomenology involves taking ourselves to be discerning real properties of things when we make certain moral observations. When we make the observation that murder is wrong we are not just expressing the fact that we have a disapprobatory attitude towards murder. We take ourselves to be making an observation about the real existence of the moral fact that murder is wrong. Such properties are “...not constituted by the availability or possibility of a characteristic human response” (Dancy, 1998: 228). Dancy correctly argues that weak realism (i.e. secondary-property realism) necessarily relies on the existence of such properties in order to make sense of what it means for moral facts to cause us to have certain characteristic responses. His argument is as follows. The best conception of secondary-property realism is that under ideal circumstances moral properties elicit a certain characteristic response in moral agents. This begs the question of what is different about attitudes that are formed under such ideal circumstances to attitudes that we possess under normal circumstances. The only plausible response seems to be that it is only under ideal circumstances that the disposition of a moral property to cause a certain response in me is revealed as it really is. However, this seems to be no more than saying that under ideal circumstances our attitudes fit (whatever sort of fit we are playing with) something further in the objects/actions. This something further would be the real property of a thing that enables it to elicit a certain characteristic response in moral agents.

This allows us to add a third essential feature to the model of moral objectivity. When we make moral judgements we (correctly) take ourselves to be pointing to real properties of an object-action. The salient point to note is that this defence of strong moral realism does not depend on the rejection of secondary-property realism. Once secondary-property realism is

seen as a *model* for making sense of the phenomenal aspects of our moral phenomenology, one can (without contradiction) add strong moral realism to the model in order to make full sense of the phenomenological fact that we take ourselves to be recognising real features about the world when making moral judgments. It is important to note that there is nothing odd about a model of objectivity that talks both about characteristic human responses (secondary-quality realism) and moral properties being real properties as such. Indeed, Dancy (1998: 229-230) himself briefly discusses pain to show how such a model might work. When I ascribe the experience of pain to someone, I am pointing out a real property that she has. At the same time, however, her experience of pain is a characteristic human response that is elicited by those properties that cause her to experience the pain.

It may be argued that though strong realism gives full expression to what moral agents take themselves to be conveying when they make moral judgments, it does so at the cost of leaving mysterious the nature of this primary property of being able to cause certain responses in moral agents. What sort of properties are these 'real' properties? The best way of understanding these moral properties is not as actually existing in space and time. This suggests an important dissimilarity between metaphysical realism and moral realism. Moral facts are rational truths and that constitutes their nature. The universality of such moral facts gives them their objective existence as rational concepts. This does not suggest that moral truths are a priori since certain empirical and other facts about society can and do determine and confer upon the moral fact its status of being a universal moral truth. What it does mean is that moral truths are similar to mathematical proposition in that they are expressive of truths that are timeless and real in a rational sense, even though they lack extension⁴⁷. Once moral facts are properly appreciated as rational truths, the temptation of importing into moral objectivity a queer ontology falls away.

This concludes my discussion of the three essential features of moral objectivity. Something is a moral fact if it is (a) a universal moral truth that (b) causes moral agents to have certain characteristic responses that depend on (c) the existence of real moral properties that enable such responses to happen.

⁴⁷ This does not preclude differences between moral facts and mathematical truths. For example, mathematical truths are usually thought of as a priori conceptual truths. I would not want to deny that moral facts lack such an a priori status, since empirical considerations are an important source of moral facts.

Part B: An example of a moral fact: Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency

In "Why rights are indispensable" Gewirth considers various conceptual as well as moral arguments that have been put forward in support of the claim that rights-talk is redundant. One species of rights that he considers is that of moral rights. The argument against moral rights is as follows. Moral rights can only make sense if they are based on some moral principle from which they are derived. Such a universal moral principle does not exist as is evidenced by the many competing moral principles that inform people's moral practices. It seems that whatever moral principle one grounds moral rights in, would have to be based on one's intuitions. This comes with the usual baggage of being arbitrary and agent-relative. So we must abandon talk of moral rights since it is not possible to find a principled grounding for such rights to give them their requisite justificatory status. In response to this objection Gewirth articulates and defends the so-called Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). I will outline and defend Gewirth's argument against various objections. More importantly, it is my contention that the PGC is an instance of a moral fact – it is a universal moral truth that elicits certain characteristic responses in moral agents which are grounded in real properties about objects/actions. The argument can be formalised as follows⁴⁸:

Stage 1

(1) I do X voluntarily for some purpose E (=I am an agent).

From (1) the agent must infer

(2) E is a good (=I have a pro-attitude to E).

She must recognise that

(3) My freedom and well-being are generically necessary conditions of my agency.

From (2) and (3) she must infer

(4) My freedom and well-being are necessary goods.

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Jeremy Allcock for his formulation and refinement of this argument.

Stage 2

Because of (4) the agent must claim

(5) I have rights to freedom and well-being⁴⁹.

Stage 3

By the logical principle of universalisation, the agent must claim

(6) All agents have rights to their freedom and well-being.

The PGC follows from all this and states that you should “act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself” (Gewirth, 1986: 339). These generic rights are the rights to freedom and well-being.

The argument is based on considerations of what the requirements for actions and generally successful action are. Premise (1) is merely a statement of what it means for me to be an agent at all. I act in such a way as to satisfy some particular end that I desire. The second premise clarifies the status of the ends which I desire. I consider such ends to be an expression of what I consider to be goods for me. Premise (3) follows as a necessary condition of what it means for me to be an agent that pursues some specified end. I cannot act voluntarily to achieve some good unless I have the freedom and well-being⁵⁰ that enable me to achieve my specified ends. Premise (4) expresses the fact that these preconditions of freedom and well-being commit the agent to demand them as a right that I take myself to have against others. If I do not express them as *entitlements* (and hence rights) against other agents then I would be allowing for the possibility of others interfering with my freedom and well-being, and so the possibility of not being an agent at all. This would contradict the first premise. In other words, the duty that I take to be resting on others to refrain from interfering with my freedom and

⁴⁹ The discussion that follows makes clear why such necessary goods have to be claimed as entitlements and hence rights.

⁵⁰ A full articulation by Gewirth of what freedom and well-being entails is found in “Reason and Morality”. For my purposes it is sufficient to recognise that *general* considerations come into play in understanding freedom and well-being. These would include the necessary space for me to be an autonomous agent, thus placing negative duties on the state to refrain from acting in certain ways. The general set of human rights that I am entitled to are an expression of, and derived from, the PGC. They give full expression to what it means to enjoy freedom and well-being.

well-being must be based on my correlative and logically prior right to freedom and well-being. In order to understand the transition from premise (5) to premise (6) two observations about premise (5) must be noted. First, premise five is not itself grounded in some moral principle. It is merely a prudential consideration. It signifies the practical-prescriptivity of the rights that the agent must demand. Second, it is important to note that the rights are claimed by the agent only for herself. The first person formulation of the argument in stages 1 and 2 is significant. However, the first and second stages of the argument are essentially of the following modus ponens form: If I am an agent, then I have rights to freedom and well-being. I am an agent. So it follows that I have rights to freedom and well-being. By the logical principle of consistency I extend this argument to enable – indeed to compel – me to claim rights to freedom and well-being for every other agent. Such an argument goes as follows. If Thandi is an agent, then she is entitled to rights to freedom and well-being. Thandi is an agent and so she is entitled to rights to freedom and well-being. This will apply *mutatis mutandis* to all other agents and so it follows that all agents have rights to their freedom and well-being. We must claim such rights for others in order not to be inconsistent in our thinking about rights. The following objection may be levelled against the universalisation of the argument. When the argument is expressed in the first person, this gives the demand for the right to freedom and well-being its prescriptive force. If I have some good E that I wish to pursue then I must demand freedom and well-being in order to satisfy that good. However, I can recognise that Thandi needs freedom and well-being in order to satisfy some good for her. This is however merely a *description* of what she needs. Since the good that she wants is not a good that I want, there is no *prescriptive* force for my claiming rights on her behalf. This results from the fact that stages 1 and 2 of the argument are subjective in the sense of being made from the agent's point of view. So it follows that the transition from premise (5) to premise (6) does not work. This problem can be fixed by making it the case that the agent *wants* others to have rights to freedom and well-being. This connative attachment to the rights of others will give the universalisation move in the overall argument its necessary prescriptive force. So the argument can be modified and extended as follows. From premise (6) on the argument should read as follows:

Premise (6') Other agents (too) must claim rights to their freedom and well-being.

Stage 4

The agent must realise that

Premise (7) I am an 'other agent' to other agents.

Therefore

Premise (8) Other agents have rights to freedom and well-being.

The transition from premise (7) to premise (8) can be explained as follows. If the agent denies premise (8) then she is committed to allowing for the possibility of others interfering with her freedom and well-being since she is an 'other agent' to other agents. This denial is not possible since it contradicts the initial premise which stated that we are agents. So the agent is committed to premise (8) and hence follows the PGC.

The PGC is a moral fact. It has all three of the essential features of a moral fact. First it is a universal moral truth. This is evidenced by the fact that it establishes a moral principle through a rational process. This moral principle is intuited by the faculty of rationality based on certain factual considerations about human beings i.e. the nature of our agency. It is also a principle that all rational moral agents must accept and this gives the principle its status as a universal truth. The principle itself provides a justificatory basis for human rights, which could be understood as giving effect to the general principle. This gives the PGC its status as a moral truth. It follows that the PGC is a universal moral truth.

The PGC also has the secondary-property of eliciting certain characteristic responses in moral agents. So, for example, when we express an attitude of disapprobation towards such morally wrong actions as slavery, it is the negation of the freedom and well-being of moral agents who are enslaved that elicit such a disapprobatory response in moral agents. The moral agent that has an approbatory attitude towards slavery has an inappropriate response since it is a response that is at odds with the moral fact expressed by the PGC. In other words, the PGC has the disposition of causing me to have a certain experience when perceiving acts that diverge with the PGC. It follows that PGC has the second feature that is essential to moral facts.

Finally, the PGC also expresses what we take ourselves to be conveying when we make moral judgments. I take myself to be pointing to a fact about the world when I say of a

particular action that slavery is wrong. This is a moral property whose existence is not dependent on it *actually* being so perceived by a moral agent. The existence of the PGC as a moral fact is not dependent on its being so perceived by a particular moral agent. The moral fact persists as a rational truth even when moral agents do not perceive it. This persistence is furthermore what enables us to make sense of what it means for the PGC to have the secondary-property of causing us to have a certain characteristic response to actions. It follows that the PGC is a moral fact.

Conclusions:

This chapter has provided a positive account of moral objectivity that synthesises various versions of moral objectivity that have traditionally been seen as rivals: weak objectivity, secondary-property moral realism and strong moral realism. This synthesis enabled the overall account to be one that gives a complete explanation of the various aspects of our moral phenomenology. The chapter concluded with a discussion on Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency and (against the sentiment's of Gewirth) argued that the PGC is not just a universal moral principle but also a moral fact according to the account of moral objectivity that I have offered here.

Coda: Opening the closet

This thesis has provided a defence of moral objectivity. It has dealt with the main enemy of moral objectivity which is relativism. It debunked the implications that Humean psychology holds for moral facts. It has also provided a positive account of moral objectivity which is able to meet the ontological, epistemological and motivational problems. However, there are a number of theses that the scope of this thesis did not allow me to venture into. These will remain in the closet but will be briefly exposed here to show what a more comprehensive exposition of my convictions on meta-ethics would include.

First, the exposition of relativism was restricted to a general survey of the main types of relativism. Whilst this has the advantage of allowing me to construct arguments against all relativist theories, it suffered the drawback of not allowing to investigate the rich variety of specific arguments that have been put forward by various relativists.

Second, while I provided an exposition of the motivation problem in terms of Humean psychology, I did not give a scholarly defence of my interpretation of Humean psychology. The motivational problem is a general problem and is not specific to Hume. My examination of the Humean position is merely indicative of the classic influence that Humean psychology has had on the articulation of this challenge. I therefore relied on Blackburn's interpretation which is the most charitable one that I have come across.

Finally, I did not have the space to provide a comprehensive model of doxastic and moral accountability. A source of my conviction that moral objectivists should take the motivational challenge seriously is precisely because of the implications that 'dangling duties' might hold for doxastic and moral responsibility. It is my conviction that any defensible account of responsibility requires that moral facts be able to motivate us. In the realm of beliefs, we are doxastically responsible for our beliefs we (a) failed to perform the necessary investigative actions or (b) if we failed to consider the matter aright. The type of belief under consideration will depend which of these two sources of doxastic responsibility is relevant. So, for example, a straightforward perceptual belief will probably invoke the issue of investigative actions. If I hold the false belief that there are two thousand philosophy students in my department, then I am doxastically responsible for failing to perform the relevant investigative actions (e.g.

asking my head of department what the right figure is) that would have resulted in the adoption of a belief that track the truth. If I fail to adopt the belief that racism is wrong even though I live in an egalitarian society that does not even statistically suggest differences that justify empirical grounds for the belief that racism is wrong, I am doxastically responsible for the false belief because I had failed to exercise the appropriate second-order reflection that would have made me realise that the belief is unjustified and should be abandoned. The account of moral responsibility in the real of action that I would endorse would mimic the key features of my account of doxastic responsibility. I briefly stated in chapter three, for example, that we hold people morally responsible for their actions because they are susceptible to judgments of justification for what they decide and do. More pertinently, such demands for justification in our moral practices are only legitimate if it is indeed the case that we can do what normative rules and laws command of us to do. There is therefore room here for an intimate investigation of the implications that an abandonment of 'ought implies can' might have for the models of doxastic and moral accountability that I am sympathetic to. I will no doubt ponder these implications in the near future with a hope of defending models of doxastic and moral accountability, which fit my cherished account of moral objectivity.

Bibliography:

1. Blackburn, S. 1998 **Ruling passions** Oxford: Oxford University Press
2. Brown, J. 1999 **Philosophy of mathematics** Routledge: London
3. Church, J. 2002 "Taking it to Heart: What Choice Do We Have?" in **Monist** Volume 85 Issue 3 p361
4. Copi, I. & Cohen, C. 1998 **Introduction to Logic** (10th ed) Prentice-Hall: New Jersey
5. Dancy, J. 1998 "Two Conceptions of Moral Realism" in **Ethical Theory 1, The question of objectivity** (editor: Rachels, J) Oxford University Press: Oxford
6. Davidson, D. 1984 "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme" in **Truth & interpretation** Clarendon Press: Oxford
7. Dennett, D. 1987 **The intentional stance** Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press
8. Frankfurt, H. 1971 "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" in **The Journal of Philosophy** Volume 68 No 1 pp5-20
9. Gettier, E.L. 1963 "Is justified true belief knowledge"? In **Analysis** vol 23, 1962-1963 pp 121-121.
10. Gewirth, A. 1986 "Why Rights are Indispensable" in **Mind** vol. XCV, no 379
11. Harman, G. 1994 "Explaining Value" in **Cultural pluralism and moral knowledge** (editors: Paul, E., Miller Jr, F., Paul, J) Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge: Cambridge
12. Harman, G & Thomson, J. 1996 **Moral relativism and moral objectivity** Blackwell Publishers Inc: Oxford
13. Harman, G. 1997 "Ethics and Observation" in **Moral discourse and practice** (editors: Darwal, S., Gibbard, A., Railton, P.) Oxford: Oxford University Press
14. Jones, W. 2002 "Our accountability for believing" (unpublished)
15. Korsgaard, C. 1996 "The origin of value and the scope of obligation" in **The sources of normativity** (editor: O' Neil, O) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge
16. Leon, M. 2002 "Responsible believers" in **Monist** Volume 85 Issue 3 p485
17. Mackie, J.L. 1977 **Ethics: inventing right and wrong** Harmondsworth: Penguin
18. Malcolm, N. 1982 "The inconceivability of mechanism" in **Free will** Oxford: Oxford University Press
19. McDowell, J. 1998 "Values and secondary qualities" in **Ethical Theory 1, The question of objectivity** (editor: Rachels, J) Oxford University Press: Oxford

20. Nagel, T. 1976 "Moral Luck" in **Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society** Supplementary Volume 50 pp 137-155
21. Nagel, T. 1986 **The view from nowhere** Oxford: Oxford University Press
22. Nagel, T. 1996 "Universality and the reflective self" in **The sources of normativity** (editor: O' Neil, O) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge
23. Nagel, T. 1997 **The last word** Oxford University Press: Oxford
24. Putnam, H. 1975 "The meaning of 'meaning'" in **Language, mind and knowledge** (editor: Gunderson, K) University of Minnesota Press: Mpls
25. Rachels, J. 1993 **The elements of moral philosophy** (2nd ed) McGraw-Hill: United States of America
26. Rachels, J. 1998 **Ethical Theory 1, The question of objectivity** (Introduction) Oxford University Press: Oxford
27. Richardson, H. 1994 **Practical reasoning about final ends** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge
28. Singer, P. **Practical Ethics**
29. Smith, M 1994 **The moral problem** Blackwell Publishers: Oxford
30. Stevenson, C. 1997 "The emotive meaning of ethical terms" in **Moral discourse and practice** (editors: Darwall, S., Gibbard, A., Railton, P.) Oxford University Press: Oxford
31. Strawson, P.F. 1974 "Freedom and Resentment" in **Freedom and resentment and other essays** London: Methuen and Co
32. Sturgeon, N. 1994 "Moral disagreement and moral relativism" in **Cultural pluralism and moral knowledge** (editors: Paul, E., Miller Jr, F., Paul, J) Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge: Cambridge
33. Williams, B. 1973 "Deciding to believe" in **Problems of the self** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge
34. Williams, B. 1981 'Internal and external reasons" in **Moral luck** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

