

**IN DEFENCE OF MORAL ERROR THEORY AND  
MORAL ABOLITIONISM**

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## **Abstract:**

In this thesis I present a challenge to anyone who continues to engage in moral thinking – that is to say, I present a challenge to most people currently alive. In the first three chapters, I defend the idea that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true ('Moral Error Theory'). On the back of this defence, I then provide arguments in support of the related - but not entailed – Moral Abolitionist account. According to this view, moral thought, moral talk and morally-coloured motivations should be abolished in favour of an entirely non-moral assessment of the world and the options that face us when we deliberate on questions regarding to 'how to act' or 'how to live'.

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## **Introduction**

Most adult human beings regularly seem to make moral judgments. Indeed, it is likely that most adult human beings who have ever lived have regularly made moral judgments, at least if we do not go too far back into our evolutionary history. Whether it be contemporary India, ancient Peru or modern day Great Britain certain actions and certain people have been affirmed as being either genuinely moral or genuinely immoral.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis I present a challenge to anyone who continues to engage in moral thinking – that is to say, I present a challenge to most people currently alive. Following in the path of Hinckfuss (1987) and Garner (2007 and 2012), in this thesis I ultimately argue that moral thought, moral talk and morally-coloured motivations should be *abolished* in favour of an entirely non-moral assessment of the world and the options that face us when we deliberate on questions regarding to ‘how to act’ or ‘how to live’.

This controversial conclusion in favour of what I label ‘Moral Abolitionism’ is supported in the initial stages of this thesis by another controversial conclusion in favour of what Mackie (1977) labelled ‘Moral Error Theory’. Although both Moral Abolitionism and Moral Error Theory have been defended in the literature previously, herein I offer a thorough, complete and unified defence of these two positions that goes beyond arguments hitherto provided in their favour. Thus, I strengthen the case for a Moral Abolitionist conclusion that most people (among both the philosopher and the folk classes) are likely to find *prima facie* extremely implausible.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/08/social-media-mocks-moral-policing-india-150809194958812.html>; Leinawever (2008); <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/12/moral-decay-blights-britain-food-banks-zero-hours>

In Chapter One, I outline the specific Moral Error Theoretic conclusion that I seek to defend – namely the claim that ‘no non-negative moral proposition is ever true’ (a statement due to Pigden (2010)). Specifically, in defence of this claim I begin by defending moral cognitivism. I then argue that moral properties are necessarily mind-independent and categorically prescriptive. Thus, in this first chapter, I fix the nature of a moral property in order to later assess whether or not the world contains properties of this distinctly moral type.

In the second chapter I turn my attention to the nature of moral experience. I offer necessary and sufficient conditions for the having of a distinctly moral experience – conditions that are both independently plausible and that support my conclusion in Chapter One regarding how moral properties are actually used by ordinary people.

In Chapter Three I focus on completing the defence of Moral Error Theory that was started in Chapter One. I provide five types of ‘moral data’ that require explanation - moral experience, private moral thinking and public moral discourse, moral agreement and moral disagreement. I accept that a moral property explanation sufficiently explains this moral data, but argue that a competing purely evolutionary explanation also sufficiently explains the moral data. Given the choice between accepting or rejecting moral properties I argue that the scales are tipped in favour of rejection due considerations of both parsimony and queerness.

In Chapter Four I outline the dialectical journey that will be traversed in the remainder of the thesis. Having defended the claim that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true I outline the choice between Moral



Abolitionism and Moral Preservationism post-vindication of Moral Error Theory. I argue that the choice between Moral Abolitionism and Moral Preservationism should be determined by assessment of the pragmatic benefits (or costs) of continuing with a moral practice that lacks any genuine truth (in the light of Moral Error Theory). Specifically, I set the scene for the next four chapters by arguing that most people will have a defeasible, instrumental reason to favour the practice (Moral Abolitionism or Moral Preservationism) that better promotes the goods of safety, prosocial behaviour, productive conflict resolution and true beliefs.

With the structure of the dialectic defended in Chapter Four, in Chapter Five I begin the substantive defence of Moral Abolitionism as the preferable option for most people post-vindication of Moral Error Theory. Specifically, I defend the initially implausible view that safety (both at personal and social levels) would be better promoted by the abolition of morality rather than by the preservation of morality. This argument is grounded by the fact that most people would continue to value the promotion of safety irrespective of the presence of moral thinking and so most people would have motivationally effective instrumental reasons to promote safety even post-abolition of morality. In addition, I highlight the safety-relevant costs associated with moral thinking, drawing particularly on the Hinckfussian (1987) description of 'the moral hierarchy'.

In Chapter Six I move on from the topic of safety to assess whether prosocial behaviour would be better promoted by preserving or abolishing morality in the context where Moral Error Theory has been vindicated. In this chapter, I argue that we should be optimistic rather than pessimistic about the characters of our fellow human beings for most human beings are *natural altruists*. This is to say that most human beings, prior to any plausible social impact from moral practice, demonstrate a willingness to help others without

any prospect of reward and even when such helping is personally costly. I argue that this natural altruism is best supported through non-moral, rather than moral, mechanisms and that moral thinking can actually be costly in respect of promoting prosocial behaviour. Thus, I conclude that prosocial behaviour is, perhaps surprisingly, better promoted by the abolition rather than the preservation of moral thinking.

In the penultimate chapter I consider the impact of both moral and non-moral practice upon levels of productive conflict resolutions. After offering a stipulative definition of a 'productive' conflict resolution I make clear that the crucial tool for making productive conflict resolutions more likely is prosocial behaviour. Thus, given the arguments of Chapter Six, it is clear that the Moral Abolitionist has the advantage in this context. In addition, to further buttress this conclusion, I highlight the distracting impact of moral thinking and the ways in which it can motivate specifically unproductive conflict resolutions.

In the final chapter I complete the defence of Moral Abolitionism, at least as far as it can be completed within this thesis, by considering the impact of moral thinking upon the promotion of true beliefs. Although I reject the view that belief in queer moral properties may undermine a generally helpful commitment to evidentialism, in so far as evidentialist belief-forming tendencies would aid the acquisition of true beliefs, I argue that moral thinking would more typically distract individuals and misdirect them away from the promotion of true beliefs compared to non-moral thinking grounded in instrumental reasons. Thus I conclude that levels of true beliefs would be better promoted by the abolition rather than the preservation of morality in the light of Moral Error Theory.

This thesis therefore brings together a two-fold attack on morality in order to argue that moral talk and moral thought should be consigned to history. Morality should be abolished not merely because no non-negative moral proposition is ever true (although this is the case) but more pertinently because moral thought and moral talk offer fewer pragmatic benefits (and more pragmatic costs) compared to non-moral thought and non-moral talk grounded in instrumental reasons. Given that most people desire the promotion of safety, prosocial behaviour, productive conflict resolutions and true beliefs, then I will argue that most people will have a defeasible, instrumentally grounded reason to abolish morality post-vindication of Moral Error Theory.

# **Chapter One: The Conceptual Commitments of Moral Error Theory**

## **1. Introduction**

**1.1** Scepticism is more popular in some domains than in others. Those sceptical about the existence of unicorns, for example, are faced with an easier challenge than those sceptical about the existence of an external world. In this thesis, I outline, defend and consider the implications of a particularly radical scepticism directed against something that most people take for granted – morality.

**1.2** In this initial chapter, I make clear the conceptual underpinnings and dialectical structure of the Moral Error Theory (hereafter, MET).

**1.2.1** To begin, I make clear how best to state the target MET conclusion. I follow Pigden (2010) in outlining a target MET conclusion that is free from technical problems that otherwise might make such a conclusion impossible to successfully defend.

**1.2.2** Having made the target conclusion clear, I lay out the form, structure and conceptual commitments underpinning MET. Specifically, I outline thoughts from Joyce (2001) and Wedgwood (2007) in a limited defence of semantic and psychological moral cognitivism. I then argue that moral properties (those entities that could make true at least some truth-apt moral propositions) must, of necessity, be both mind-independent and categorically prescriptive. Finally, I deny a thought from Mackie (1977) that moral properties must also, of necessity, be motivationally prescriptive.

**1.3** The work in this chapter thus sets the scene for analysis in Chapter Three that will complete a full defence of MET. Specifically, in Chapter Three I evaluate whether or not we should accept the existence of moral properties –

defined in this chapter as being necessarily mind-independent and categorically prescriptive.

## **2. MET – Target Conclusion**

**2.1** Mackie (1977:35), in his seminal work defending MET, stated that:

“Although most people in making moral judgments implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, *these claims are all false.*”<sup>2</sup>

Although Mackie (1946) had suggested a view of this type previously, and others such as Russell (1922), Tegen (1944), Robinson (1948) and Wittgenstein (1965) had also expressed similar such views (if only fleetingly), the arguments from the 1977 work have come to define MET.<sup>3</sup>

**2.2** Mackie’s conclusion as stated in his later work sets the tone for this thesis, though I neither tread entirely the same path as Mackie nor end up in entirely the same location. This is because I take the ‘Mackian statement’ of MET to require refinement both in respect of argument and conclusion. Refinement at the former level occurs both later in this chapter as well as in Chapter Three and is important in order to make sure that moral properties are defined accurately and then rejected fairly; rejection of moral properties in virtue of characteristics and attributes that they would not actually possess would be unappealing. I begin, however, by refining MET’s target conclusion.

**2.3** There are at least two problems with the conclusion of MET as stated by Mackie (1977:35). These problems are *technical* rather than *substantive* because they regard the scope of the MET conclusion, rather than issues that may undermine the more general MET thought that ordinary moral claims lack a positive truth-value. Below, I follow (Pigden 2010) in clearing a path past these technical problems.

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Olson (2014) discusses the MET sympathies of these other philosophers.

**2.4** The first technical issue afflicting the original MET conclusion is what Pigden (2010:27) calls the “Doppelganger” problem due to the way in which a false moral claim seems to be closely related to a very similar true moral claim. This is based on the apparent fact that it cannot be the case that all moral claims are false, since the negations of some moral claims are themselves moral. If these negations are true (as they must be per MET), then at least some moral claims are true. Given this, it cannot be that all moral claims are false – the original MET conclusion is technically flawed.

**2.4.1** Consider the following example, based on the moral claim that ‘it is wrong to cheat a friend out of money’. If this moral claim is false – as the defender of MET would insist - then its negation is true. However, this means that ‘it is not morally wrong to cheat a friend out of money’ is true. If this is a moral claim – and it certainly involves moral language – then the falsity of one moral claim has entailed the truth of a different moral claim. As Pigden (2010:28) puts it:

“...if the negations of *some* moral judgments are moral judgments, then it cannot be the case that *all* moral judgments are false.”

**2.5** The Doppelganger problem can be avoided by denying the moral status of negated moral claims. This is not the response that I adopt here – though I do not rule out the possibility of success for this tactic.

**2.6** Rather than taking the above tack, I follow Pigden (2010:28) in his suggested refinement of the original Mackian MET conclusion. The Doppelganger problem is avoided if the target conclusion of MET is:

“All non-negative atomic moral judgments are false”

**2.6.1** A moral judgment is non-negative when it either prescribes or opposes an action/situation/character trait or other moral value bearing object. Meanwhile, a moral claim is negative when it opposes a non-negative moral judgment, for example claims of the form ‘x is *not* morally wrong’ or ‘x is *not* morally right’. With the refined MET conclusion in mind, the truth of the

negation of the moral claim that 'it is morally wrong to cheat a friend out of money' is no longer a threat. This is because while the negative moral claim that 'it is not morally wrong to cheat a friend out of money' is true, MET does not seek to rule such truth out.

**2.6.2** This refinement is generally successful because, as Pigden (2010:29) says:

“...the negation of a non-negative moral proposition is never a non-negative atomic moral proposition.”

If the conclusion of MET is as stated in 2.6, then there is no reason to fear that the truth of a non-negative moral proposition will ever be entailed by the falsity of a related non-negative moral proposition. The negation of a non-negative moral proposition will only ever entail a true negative moral proposition.

**2.7** Pigden's suggested refinement of the target conclusion protects MET from the Doppelganger problem. However, what Pigden (2010:30) calls the “Reinforced Doppelganger” problem also requires response if I am to be able to successfully state a MET conclusion free from technical drawbacks. This problem is based on the following principles that threaten the conclusion above:

RD1: 'It is not the case that action x is morally wrong' entails 'action x is morally right or permissible'

RD2: 'It is not the case that action x is morally right or permissible' entails 'action x is morally wrong'<sup>4</sup>

**2.7.1** If 'it is morally wrong to cheat a friend out of money' is a false claim (as per MET), then this entails the truth of the claim that 'it is not morally wrong to cheat a friend out of money'. So far, this rehearses the original Doppelganger problem. However, given RD1, this negative moral claim also

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<sup>4</sup> I have added a reference to permissibility to the conditions, for the sake of consistency.

entails that ‘it is morally right or permissible to cheat a friend out of money’. This is quite obviously a non-negative moral proposition.

**2.7.2** The RD principles suggest that the truth of a negative moral claim (accepted by our refined MET) *can* entail a related non-negative moral claim. Therefore, even the refined conclusion of MET seems unable to hold up under pressure, since it is impossible to hold that all non-negative moral claims are false if the negation of a non-negative moral claim entails a true negative moral claim, which in turn entails a different, but related, true non-negative moral claim.

**2.7.3** Facing the Reinforced Doppelganger problem, Pigden (2010:30) states:

“...[t]here is only one way out for the [Moral Error Theorist]. He has to deny the RD principles.”

I agree with Pigden. Fortunately, the cost of denying the RD principles is minimal. Per Pigden (2010:31), the picture of logical space suggested by the RD principles is outlined below:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Morally Right/Permissible</b>	<b>Morally Wrong</b>
$\psi$	YES	NO
$\varphi$	NO	YES

This picture rules out the possibility of MET *of necessity* (Pigden 2010:30). Yet, the critic of the refined MET conclusion cannot merely object by begging the question against the very possibility of MET being correct. The RD principles are not independently asserted evidence brought against the refined MET conclusion, they are a brute denial of the possibility of MET. Indeed, the principles exemplify a brute denial based on the picture of logical space above that lacks any obvious analytic plausibility.

**2.7.4** In opposition, the picture of logical space suggested by MET is as follows:



<b>Action</b>	<b>Morally Right/Permissible</b>	<b>Morally Wrong</b>	<b>Neither Morally Right/Permissible nor Morally Wrong</b>
$\psi$	NO	NO	YES
$\varphi$	NO	NO	YES

As Pigden (2010:31) puts it:

“...where there is nobody with the authority to permit or forbid, the fact that something is not forbidden does not entail that it is permitted.”

Clearly, this picture of logical space requires its own defence – it is not obviously analytic that an act can be *neither* morally right/permissible nor morally wrong just as it is not obviously analytic that an act must be *either* morally right/permissible or morally wrong. However, the mere statement of the RD principles does not undermine the possibility that the above is the correct way to understand logical space in the moral domain. Suggesting that MET is possible, but in need of robust defence, is hardly a serious concession for the defender of MET to make. Defending this picture of logical space is, broadly, the task of the first three chapters on this thesis and Chapter Three in particular.

**2.8** Given the Doppelganger and Reinforced Doppelganger problems and the allowance of truth for some negative moral propositions, it may be suggested that this refined conclusion is not as potent or as shocking as the original Mackian version. After all, claiming that all moral claims are false is different to claiming only that all non-negative moral claims are false.

**2.8.1** However, shorn of the implicit inferences suggested by the RD principles, the slight relaxation of the original Mackian conclusion does not undermine the boldness of MET. If it is not the case that a negative moral claim entails a non-negative moral claim, and all non-negative moral claims are false, then MET remains a radical and surprising position. With the target conclusion clear, I next turn to outline the wider structure of MET.

### **3. MET – Structure**

**3.1** According to Kirchin (2010:168), Joyce (2001:17) and Shafer-Landau (2005:109), MET has a two-part dialectic. Firstly, the defender of MET engages in conceptual analysis in order to fix the nature of putative moral properties before then engaging in ontological analysis that leads to the conclusion that such moral properties do not exist.

**3.2** The two dialectical steps identified are crucial parts of MET. However, there is a third step that precedes the two highlighted above. The full-three part process for defending MET involves:

1. Defence of Semantic Moral Cognitivism (further defined in 4.2.1 – roughly the view that moral judgments are *truth-apt* and *descriptive* in nature)
2. Conceptual Analysis (as described in 3.1)
3. Ontological Analysis (as described in 3.1)

**3.3** The defence of semantic moral cognitivism (hereafter, the ‘moral’ label is assumed) is crucial for reasons made clear in section four. MET-friendly conclusions are required at all three stages of the dialectic in order for the MET conclusion stated in section two to be vindicated.

**3.3.1** Over the next three chapters, I engage with all three parts of the MET dialectic, but such engagement comes in varying degrees. Ontological analysis must wait until Chapter Three. In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the first two steps. However, greater attention is paid to conceptual analysis than to the defence of semantic cognitivism for reasons that become clear in the next section.

### **4. Justifying an Acceptance of Semantic Cognitivism**

**4.1** The conclusion that all non-negative moral propositions are false is only interesting if people actually make truth-apt non-negative moral claims in

ordinary discourse. Ordinary speakers cannot be convicted of serious error if they do not make the types of moral claims that MET attempts to show are false. Thus, a crucial part of the wider defence of MET is making clear that ordinary moral speakers do make the mistake that MET suggests.

**4.2** MET is thus dependent upon what I refer to below as semantic cognitivism. In addition, below I also make clear what psychological cognitivism amounts to as well as the positions that directly oppose these two cognitivist theories.

**4.2.1** First, consider possible ways of understanding *moral language*:

*Semantic Cognitivism*: Moral judgments are semantically *truth-apt*. They attempt to *refer* to aspects of the world in order to thereby provide an accurate *description* of the world. These judgments are true or false depending on the accuracy of the description.

*Expressivism*: Moral judgments are not attempted descriptions of the world and are not referential in nature. Instead, they are expressions of attitudes. They may be truth-apt, but their truth is not determined by their reference to aspects of the world in the way that the semantic cognitivist suggests.

**4.2.2** Next, consider the *psychology* that may be associated with moral language:

*Psychological Cognitivism*: Our moral language involves expression of beliefs.

*Non-Cognitivism*: Our moral language involves expression of attitudes, such as “desires, preferences, emotions, intentions or the like” (Wedgwood 2007:37)

**4.2.3** An entire thesis would likely be required in order to make a serious contribution to the debate between semantic and psychological cognitivists, semantic expressivists and psychological non-cognitivists. Given this, it might be reasonable simply to assume that both forms of cognitivism are correct and proceed on this basis. However, given the necessity of semantic cognitivism to the MET picture it would be unfortunate not to give serious

comment to this position – avoiding any discussion of semantic cognitivism would seem to leave a flank wide open to attack in terms of the argument provided for MET in the first three chapters of this thesis. Although I do not claim that semantic expressivists and psychological non-cognitivists will be left entirely reeling at the end of this section on the basis of new and original thoughts I do seek to provide sufficient grounds for optimism regarding the prospects for both forms of cognitivism, thereby licensing the step forward from this discussion to the type of conceptual analysis suggested by MET.

**4.3** Given the statements of semantic and psychological cognitivism above it is clear that these cognitivist positions are technically distinct and can be opposed in different ways. However, it is also clear that expressivism and non-cognitivism would seem to stand or fall together (Wedgwood 2007:38) for the semantic and psychological versions of cognitivism seem to be natural bedfellows. Consider the following analysis of a standard moral claim, where  $x$  is a value-bearing object, such as a person or an action, while  $F$  is a moral predicate, such as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

**4.3.1**  $x$  is  $F$

According to the semantic cognitivist,  $x$  *refers* to an object, while  $F$  *refers* to a moral property or fact. The whole statement counts as an attempted description of the world that will be true or false depending on the accuracy of the description. Given all this, it is natural to view the associated psychological state as being *belief* that  $x$  is  $F$ . Semantic and psychological cognitivism fit neatly together.

**4.3.2**  $x$  is  $F$

According to the expressivist picture,  $x$  *refers* to an object, but  $F$  does not *refer* to a moral property or fact. Instead,  $F$  is non-referential and the whole statement is not an attempted description. Given all this, it is natural to view the associated psychological state as being an expression of a non-cognitivist *attitude* (such as a desire etc.).

**4.4** It is important to be clear exactly how one might defend the idea that ordinary moral judgments are truth-apt in order to make clear that ordinary moral judgments (that are ‘non-negative’) can be false as MET suggests. To this end, in what follows I defend semantic cognitivism and critique expressivism. Given the links made clear between the semantic and psychological cognitivist positions detailed above, this discussion should also increase confidence in the correctness of the psychological cognitivist understanding of ordinary moral psychology. From here, when I refer to ‘cognitivism’ I mean semantic cognitivism unless stated otherwise.

**4.5** Cognitivism is a popular view, accepted not merely by MET supporters. Moral Realists, who take at least some non-negative moral propositions to be true in virtue of their correctly referring to and describing moral features of the world, are also cognitivists. Initially, the form of our ordinary language and discourse does seem to indicate that the cognitivist has the correct broad picture. Claims such as ‘x is wrong’, superficially at least, seem to be both truth-apt and expressions of belief in that they are stated in much the same way as other claims that clearly are truth-apt and expressions of beliefs. Expressivists (and non-cognitivists) have offered explanations as to why we may be misled by the apparent form of ordinary moral claims into acceptance of the cognitivist interpretation. However, Joyce (2001:13) provides a convincing list of reasons indicating that defusing explanations of apparently cognitivist discourse are mistaken and that the:

“...linguistic conventions that govern moral discourse are those of assertions [cognitive mental states]”.

Joyce’s list of reasons is as follows:

- “1. They (moral utterances) are expressed in the indicative mood
2. They can be transformed into interrogative sentences
3. They appear embedded in propositional attitude contexts
4. They are considered true or false, correct or mistaken

5. They are considered to have an impersonal, objective character
6. The putative moral predicates can be transformed into abstract singular terms (e.g. “goodness”), suggesting they are intended to pick out properties
7. They are subject to debate which bears all the hallmarks of factual disagreement

We can add to this list two related characteristics highlighted by Peter Geach.

8. They appear in linguistically complex contexts (e.g. as the antecedents of conditions)
9. They appear as premises in arguments considered valid.”

Brink (1989:25) makes a similar claim regarding the apparently cognitivist qualities of ordinary moral language when he suggests that:

“...moral discourse is typically declarative or assertive in form.”

Given these features of moral talk, Joyce (2001:14) is content to surmise that:

“...if something walks and talks like a bunch of assertions it’s highly likely that it is a bunch of assertions.”

**4.6.1** Joyce’s list certainly puts the onus on the expressivist. Unfortunately for the expressivist, I agree with Wedgwood (2007) that expressivism has its own explanatory problems. Contra expressivism, Wedgwood (2007:54-5) suggests that there seems to be:

“...some further point or purpose in conforming to the standards of justification and warrantedness that apply to normative statements and judgments”

Wedgwood (2007:50) claims that this further point or purpose is something beyond a:

“...*fetish* for logical consistency”

Instead, Wedgwood (2007:51) says that the further point or purpose is to conform to:

“...standards of warrantedness or justification [in order to] ensure that one makes only “winning” statements or “winning” judgments.”

As a result of this (2007:53):

“An account of the meaning of a sentence must include some account of the condition that has to be met if the sentence is to have the property [of being a winning sentence].”

**4.6.2** If the reason to care about standards of warrantedness and justification in a normative or moral context is to attempt to make only winning sentences, then Wedgwood must make clear the features of a winning sentence. Thus, he (2007:53) says:

“[1] If a sentence has the [winning] property, the statement made by uttering the sentence will achieve the point or purpose of conforming to the distinctive standards of justification or warrantedness that apply to statements

[2] If a sentence *s* has this property, then no sentence logically inconsistent with *s* has this property

[3] This property is preserved in all logically valid inferences

[4] Accepting that a sentence has the property commits one to accepting the statement that one could make by uttering that very sentence”

**4.6.3** If the above is correct, and people care about standards of warrantedness and justification when making moral claims (as they seem to), then the cognitivist is in a very strong explanatory position. This is because, per Wedgwood (2007:53):

“It is surely highly plausible that the only property that has all these [winning] features is *truth*. To be a “winning” sentence is just to be a *true* sentence; and to be a “winning” statement just is to be a *correct* statement.”

On this basis, Wedgwood (2007:54) concludes that:

“...the semantics of normative terms is truth-conditional, contrary to what the expressivist claims”.

The semantic cognitivist picture sketched in 4.2.1 thus captures the truth-conditional semantic structure of moral claims described above. When making moral claims, we attempt to make winning claims, and claims are only winning if they are true. Thus, our moral talk *aims* at truth just as the semantic cognitivist suggests.

**4.7** Non-cognitivists and expressivists may yet have responses to both Joyce (2001) and Wedgwood (2007). Specifically, expressivists may outline a way in which the aim for winning (true) claims can be captured within an expressivist framework given that expressivists need not completely eschew the concept of truth; whether or not an expressivist account could adequately capture our ‘aiming at truth’ may be another matter however. Still, I have shown that, at worst, cognitivism has plenty going for it. It is therefore fair for me to assume the success of cognitivism within the rest of both this chapter and the thesis more broadly, even if the case is not yet entirely closed in favour of the cognitivist.

## **5. MET Conceptual Analysis – Broad Claims**

**5.1** If moral claims are truth-apt, and would be made true if they could correctly describe moral features of the world, then it is important to understand what those features of the world have to be like. If we assume the truth of cognitivism then we must understand the moral predicate ‘morally right’ as referring (or attempting to refer) to something – the question to address is what the predicate refers to.

**5.1.1** In the rest of this chapter and thesis, I refer to moral properties as putative entities in the world that would make moral judgments of the form ‘x is F’ true. I make no particular defence of property-talk other than to suggest that speaking of moral properties, in one form or another, is both common and natural if we are attempting to understand how non-negative moral



propositions might be made true. Mackie (1977) referred to moral properties, as did Dancy (1981), Garner (2000) and Slutsky (2001) among many others.

**5.2** The Moral Error Theorist must engage in conceptual analysis in order to fix both the characteristics of moral properties and to make clear that such characteristics are necessary to the concept of a moral property.

**5.2.1** Joyce (2001) referred to “non-negotiable” features of moral properties.

In the sections that follow, I defend the following as conceptually non-negotiable and necessary features of moral properties:

1. Mind-independence

2. Categorical Prescriptivity

Any putative moral property that lacks these two features is not, I argue, a genuine moral property.

**5.3** Unlike Mackie (1977), I *do not* claim that motivational prescriptivity is a conceptually necessary feature of a moral property. Motivationally prescriptive properties, as I discuss in section eleven, would motivate anyone who recognised them to act in accordance with their normative direction. However, just as a football team that lacks a goal-scoring striker is still a football team (albeit, perhaps, a less potent one), so a moral property that lacks motivational prescriptivity is still a moral property (albeit, perhaps, a less potent one).

**5.4** In the coming sections, I explain these three characteristics as listed above and then defend (or not, in the case of motivational prescriptivity) their necessity to the concept of a moral property. Thus, by the end of the chapter it should be clear what type of property is required in order to make true some non-negative moral claims.

## **6. Mind Independence – Explanation**

**6.1** Before the necessity of mind-independence to moral properties can be defended, it must be made clear what mind-independence amounts to. On my view, a set of judgments are judgments about mind-independent properties only if those judgments are *both* ‘stance independent’ (Shafer-Landau 2003:15) and possess sufficiently rigid truth conditions (Lillehammer 2007).

**6.2** Prior to making clear how to understand the second requirement upon mind-independent properties – that a set of judgments about such properties have sufficiently rigid truth-conditions – I begin outlining what ‘stance-independence’ amounts to in so far as judgments about mind-independent properties must be stance-independent judgments. A judgment is stance-independent if the accuracy of the judgment is not determined by the views, sentiments or opinions of the subject making the judgment. Shafer-Landau (2003:15) summarises:

“For an objective [mind-independent] moral property, the truth of claims about the location of the property in any particular scenario should be determined independently of our judgments or stance.”

By ‘our’ judgments or stance, I understand a judgment regarding the location of a moral property to be stance-independent if that judgment is true or false independently of both the judgement or stance of the person making the judgment and independently of the judgments or stances of others.

**6.2.1** Zangwill (1994:206) also outlines conditions for stance-independence in more formal terms that may help to illuminate stance-independence.

Although Zangwill refers to the following as conditions for mind-independence more broadly, I explain below why these conditions are better understood as necessary for mind-independence rather than sufficient.

According to Zangwill, utilising the example of the property of moral badness, judgments about the property are stance-independent when the following can hold:

“it is not the case that if we think X is bad then it is bad

and

it is not the case that if X is bad then we think it is”

Where Zangwill refers to our ‘thinking’ about an action, I take this to be the exemplification of the taking of a ‘stance’ regarding the moral qualities of that action. The possibility of error is therefore built into stance-independent judgments about mind-independent properties.

**6.2.2** The necessity of stance independence for judgments about mind-independent properties also ensures that the ‘is/seems’ distinction is respected. The mere fact that Luke believes meat eating to be morally wrong would not thereby automatically confer the property of moral wrongness onto individual instances of meat-eating given the stance-independent restriction. Stance-independence ensures that how it *seems* to Luke can be different from how it *is*.

**6.2.3** Zangwill (1994:207-8) is also clear about the necessity of stance-independence for judgments about mind-independent moral properties. He says:

“...the moral value of this [act/state of affairs] does not depend on the judgment that it has that value.”

However, defence of this necessity waits until section seven.

**6.3** Lillehammer (2007) highlights why stance-independence is necessary, but not sufficient, for mind-independence. Lillehammer (2007:5) provides examples of properties, judgments about which are stance-independent, but do not appear deserving of the ‘fully mind-independent’ label.

**6.3.1** Lillehammer provides the example of the property of being fashionable. Plausibly, judgments about what is fashionable are stance-independent. The mere fact that Ben judges a leather jacket to be fashionable does not make it true that the outfit is fashionable. Ben could be wrong since his judgment

does not confer the property onto the jacket; his stance does not determine the truth-value of his fashion judgment.

**6.3.2** In addition to Lillehammer's fashion example, judgments about 'great footballers' are also plausibly stance-independent. For example, the fact that I judge that Brad Harris of AFC Rushden and Diamonds to possess the property of being a 'great footballer' does not determine the truth of this judgment.

**6.4** Yet, despite the apparent stance-independence of fashion ascriptions or judgments about footballing greatness, the properties in question are not mind-independent. This is because the truth-conditions for these judgments are highly subjective in that they are determined by the stances and judgments of groups of people, even if they are not determined by *individual* stance. The presence of the property of 'being fashionable' or 'being a great footballer' is determined entirely by prevailing subjective tastes stemming from prevailing subjective group conventions. These conventions should not be relevant to the truth conditions of judgment regarding fully mind-independent properties.

**6.4.1** If fashion tastes changed, for example, then a coat that was in possession of the property of being fashionable would lose this property – all without any material change of the coat itself. If footballing tastes changed, then a retired footballer once considered to have had a great career may come to be redefined as an average player – all without any change to his historical actions or statistics. Whilst stance-independence of judgments about mind-independent properties is necessary, we demand something more from mind-independent properties in respect of avoiding susceptibility to changing social whims and tastes.

**6.5** Following Lillehammer (2007:5), I take a property to be fully mind-independent only when judgments about that property are stance-independent *and* have sufficiently rigid truth-conditions. By sufficiently rigid truth-conditions, I mean that a judgment about a mind-independent property must have the same truth-conditions in all possible worlds. Lillehammer uses

the example of the type of definitional rigidity suggested by Kripke (1980) between water and H<sub>2</sub>O. Truth conditions for judgments about water are the same in all possible worlds – the truth of such judgments is linked to whether or not they refer to a substance with the chemical structure H<sub>2</sub>O. No matter how views or tastes change, the truth-conditions for such judgments remain rigid.

**6.5.1** This rigidity in truth-conditions is different to the non-rigid truth-conditions possessed by judgments about fashion or footballing greatness. Truth-conditions for these judgments are different in different possible worlds, susceptible as they are to changing social whims and changing tastes. For example, the judgment that Brad Harris is a great footballer may be true in this world, but false in a possible world where holding midfielders who score crucial late goals are not so well appreciated.

**6.5.2** A better example of a genuinely mind-independent property is the property of ‘being made of steel’. An object either possess this quality or it does not – the property exists in an object independent of stance and the truth-conditions governing judgments regarding such properties are the same in all possible worlds; they make no reference to tastes or values of individuals or of societies/cultures. Moral properties, if they are to be *mind-independent*, must be more like the property of ‘being made of steel’ than the property of ‘being fashionable’.

**6.6** It may be initially tempting to believe that only response-independent properties could fulfil the conditions laid out for mind-independence. Response-independent properties can be understood as properties akin to Lockean primary qualities. Locke (2001:99) referred to such primary qualities as being:

“...utterly inseparable from the body”

Paradigmatic examples of such properties, according to Locke, are:

“...solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number.”

Such properties are response-independent because their presence does not depend upon the elicitation of any response from any individuals or groups in any particular circumstance (more on this below). Per Lillehammer (2007:6):

“[These properties exist] independently of the contingent practice...and the relevant attitudes of those who make [property claims].”

Sayre-McCord (1988:15) further illuminates the concept of a response-independent property when describing the truth-conditions of judgments about such properties as needing to:

“...make no reference at all to people, their capacities, practices, or their conventions.”

On this basis, it is clear that ‘being made of steel’ is a primary quality, a response-independent property and a mind-independent property.

**6.6.1** Given the nature of response-independent properties, it may seem impossible to locate a more appropriate property for the label of being mind-independent. As their defining characteristic, response-independent properties are understood in terms that make no reference to any disposition to elicit certain reactions from certain people in certain circumstances. If moral properties were response-independent properties, they would be mind-independent properties also.

**6.7** However, while response-independence does seem to entail mind-independence, it is not clear that the reverse holds. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that certain properties can be both response-*dependent* and mind-*independent*. If this was the case, then a moral property could be understood as being either response-independent or response-dependent. To understand the way in which a moral property could be response-dependent, it is necessary to be clear what response-dependence amounts to.

**6.7.1** Again, Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities points us in the correct direction. Locke (2001:99) refers to secondary qualities as properties that:

“...in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but [have the] power to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities”

Building on this, McDowell (1988:170) states that:

“Secondary qualities are not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states, and thus subjective themselves in a sense that that characterisation defines.”

Using colour as an example of such a secondary quality, McDowell (1988:168) says:

“A secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance...Thus an object’s being red is understood as obtaining in virtue of the object’s being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red.”

The fact that I might judge something to be red does not mean that it is red – the colour judgment is stance-independent. The question is not, then, whether or not judgments about secondary qualities can be stance-independent, but whether or not they can meet the second requirement of mind-independence; whether or not the judgments can have sufficiently rigid truth-conditions.

**6.7.2** Talk of response-dependent properties is simply an expansion of the secondary quality talk from McDowell above. Zangwill (2003:285) makes clear the broad conditions for a response-dependent moral property:

“...roughly, that moral goodness (or obligation, virtue, duty etc.) is a disposition to provoke approval in certain people in certain circumstances”

Zangwill also notes that:

“This general schema leaves open scope for considerable variation. Different people or different circumstances might be in question.”

In addition, Johnston (1989:141), discussing colour as a possible response-dependent property, says:

“...colour concepts are conceptually dependent upon the concepts of our responses under certain conditions”

**6.7.3** The possibility of variation suggested by Zangwill is crucial because it opens a path to judgments about certain response-dependent properties having truth-conditions that are sufficiently rigid to justify the tag of ‘mind-independent’ for the property. Below, I discuss three specific types of response-dependent property and make clear how close each is to being a mind-independent property also. The list of response-dependence types may not be exhaustive, but is sufficiently refined for purposes here.

**6.7.4** *Type One Response-Dependent Property:* A property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to elicit a certain reaction from *individual people* in certain circumstances.

**6.7.4.1** This type of response dependent property cannot be characterised as being mind-independent. Before concerning ourselves with the rigidity of truth-conditions for judgments about this type of property, we should note that judgments regarding these properties are not even stance-independent. For example, a house may plausibly have the property of ‘being scary’ just in virtue of a person finding it scary. Equally, a playground may have the property of ‘being fun’, just in virtue of a child finding it a fun place to be. Even if these particular examples could be doubted, it is apparent that properties of this type do not respect the ‘is/seems’ distinction, nor Zangwill’s (1994:206) conditions, in the way that mind-independent properties must. If moral properties were response-dependent in this way, they would not be mind-independent.

**6.7.5** *Type-Two Response Dependent Property:* A property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in



virtue of the object's disposition to elicit a certain reaction from a certain *group* of people in certain circumstances.

**6.7.5.1** The makeup of the 'group' that determines the presence of a property of this type in an object will vary from property to property. An outfit, for example, is fashionable if it elicits a positive reaction from what might be called the 'trend-setting' group and non-fashionable if it fails to elicit such a reaction. On the other hand, a restaurant might have the property of 'being a place of fine-dining' if a group of food critics or chefs agree and lack such a property if they do not. I will not qualify the notion of a group as it might pertain to moral properties here as this would be a controversial task that turns out to be unnecessary. This is because while judgments about such properties may be stance-independent, these judgments lack sufficiently rigid truth-conditions to justify the labelling these properties as mind-independent properties, for the reasons described earlier. If moral properties were response-independent in this way, they would not be mind-independent.

**6.7.6** *Type Three Response-Dependent Property:* A property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to elicit a certain reaction from *ideal* people in certain (*ideal?*) circumstances.

**6.7.6.1** Above, I refer to an ideal person rather than an ideal group but presumably an ideal person would have the same reaction to an object as an ideal group. If this is not the case, it is not an issue that I address here for the specification above is adequately coherent for illustrative purposes regardless of a perfect specification. I suggest that it is plausible that a type three of response dependent property could be characterised as being mind-independent. The property of 'being a masterpiece' may be response dependent in this way. A painting might be a masterpiece irrespective of the reaction of certain actual groups of people, but instead because of the reaction that an ideal person might have (perhaps in ideal conditions). The truth-conditions for judgments about such properties would thereby be

sufficiently rigid – the same in all possible worlds if we assume that ideal observers do not vary in identity or judgment from world to world.<sup>5</sup>

**6.7.6.2** If moral properties were response-dependent in this way, as Firth (1952) first suggested in a form of an ‘Ideal Observer’ ethical theory, then it would be fair to call them mind-independent, since they could be understood without any reference at all to actual people or groups. The truth of judgments about such properties may be dependent upon idealised responses, but they are independent of stance and, at least plausibly, have the same truth conditions across all possible worlds.

**6.8** In this section, I have argued that for a property to be mind-independent more is required than for judgments about that property merely to be stance-independent. In addition, judgments about mind-independent properties must also have sufficiently rigid truth-conditions – truth-conditions that are constant in all possible worlds. I have accepted that response independent properties are mind-independent, but also that at least one type of response dependent property could also be described as being mind-independent.

**6.8.1** I do not take a view as to whether it is better to understand moral properties as response dependent or response independent properties. This is a question that I do not need to take a view on but was worthwhile discussing in order to illuminate the different ways in which a moral property might be understood in terms of being mind-independent. However, in the next section, I make clear that mind-independence (in whatever form it comes in) is necessary to the concept of a moral property.

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<sup>5</sup> Although this seems a reasonable qualification, Hume did not share the view that ideal observers make the same judgments even within a world.. According to Levinson (2002:228), Hume admitted that ideal critics would “blamelessly differ in humour or temperament” from one another. As Levinson says, this suggests that “differences at least in degree of approbation accorded particular works are to be expected.” If Hume was correct, it casts doubt upon the view that these response-dependent properties would be mind-independent. I do not pursue this issue here.

## **7. The Necessity of Mind-Independence**

**7.1** Mackie (1977:59) claimed that moral properties issued:

“...requirements which are simply there, in the nature of things”

I address the issue of prescriptivity in the next sections of this chapter, but Kirchin (2010:175) has helpfully clarified one of the necessary features of moral properties that Mackie had in mind in his above statement:

“Mackie means to say that [moral properties are] independent of people’s responses, desires, and commitments.”

Given my explanation of mind-independence in section six, I take myself to be following in the Mackian spirit in claiming that mind-independence is necessary for a property to be moral (assuming that Mackie had in mind independence from non-ideal people’s responses, desires and commitments).

**7.2** Herein, I provide a *reductio* of the view that moral properties could be anything other than mind-independent in the way described. This is an approach that has been considered before by Sinclair (2008:264):

“Were expressivism to entail the claim that the moral value of things depends on our judgments concerning their value then this could rightly be considered a *reductio* of the position.”

As long as Sinclair is referring to actual rather than ideal judgments then I would expect he and I to be in agreement on the merit of the *reductio* strategy pursued in this section.

**7.3** The *reductio* proceeds with the example of a tribal warlord. Imagine that the warlord judges it to be morally right for him to torture anyone who dares to criticise him. For the sake of clarity, also assume that there are no strange circumstances in this case – the warlord simply feels morally justified in abusing his critics.

**7.3.1** It is *prima facie* clear that all sides of the debate would wish to claim that the tribal warlord is mistaken in his assertion that his acts of torture

possess the property of moral rightness. If anything at all is morally wrong, his torturing is.

**7.3.2** However, if moral properties are not mind-independent in the way described in section six, then morally judging the warlord's actions is difficult. If judgments about moral properties lack stance-independence, and thereby lack mind-independence, then the fact that the warlord takes his actions to be morally right may be enough to make his claim correct. If judgments about moral properties lack sufficiently rigid truth-conditions, and thereby lack mind-independence, then the unpleasant tastes of a certain group of people may also allow his claim to moral rightness to be correct. If this is as absurd as it seems – for *nothing* (short of redescribed circumstances) should make his actions morally right – then the necessity of mind-independence to moral properties looks to be clear.

**7.4** Perhaps the most detailed and popular of positions opposing the necessity of mind-independence to moral properties is moral subjectivism. Graham (2010:90) provides a succinct statement of a nuanced version of this position:

“A moral theory T, is ability-constrained-evidence-subjectivism. According to T, a person has the moral obligations that she has at a time solely in virtue of both facts about her abilities and facts about her evidential situation at (or prior to) that time. Most subjectivists hold that the true moral theory is ability-constrained-evidence-subjectivism.”

**7.4.1** Given the above, subjectivists could attempt to explain the warlord example in the following way. Firstly, the bullet is bitten that, from his perspective and with the evidence available to him, the warlord could be acting in a morally correct way. However, this fact would not imply that, from our perspective and with our evidence base, we could not legitimately morally condemn the warlord. Via this method, the justification of our moral condemnation of both the warlord and others of his ilk is preserved.

**7.5** However, the above is an unappealing explanation of the situation. Firstly, building on thoughts from Ross, Graham (2010:91) says:

“When we change our view about our moral obligations as a result of acquiring information, we don’t take it that our moral obligations have changed. Rather, it seems to us that we, at last, have come to see what our moral obligations were all along. If this seeming is not delusory, then objectivism [mind-independence, in my terms] must be correct.”

If we apply Graham’s comments to the warlord example, then it is clear that the subjectivist faces a problem. The warlord as described, at  $T_1$ , judges that it is morally right to torture. However, if the warlord is presented with new evidence – let us say that he comes to know of the pain that his orders are inflicting, or he conceives of this pain in a different way to before – then, at  $T_2$ , he may no longer believe that it is morally right to torture. Yet, in this setting, it does not appear as if the morality of the situation has changed as a result of the warlord acquiring a new evidence base. On the contrary, it seems that the warlord has come to realise a truth that *was there all along* – that torturing is not morally right.

**7.5.1** The ability to be morally mistaken, and learn new information that helps to correct that mistake, seems to be a necessary element of morality. Zangwill (1994:215) states that:

“The disputants in a moral argument must think that there is a right answer about which they are arguing, or else they would not be arguing at all...Moral argument presupposes the idea of correctness in judgment.”

However, the subjectivist fails to capture such moral disagreement properly, as the example of the warlord shows. Not only would we be unable to properly show our opponent – with his different evidence base – to be incorrect, we would also be unable to properly disagree with our past selves if our evidence base changes over time.

**7.6** Further, consider your response if the warlord – at  $T_1$  with his original attitudes and evidence base – asked for your advice regarding the moral course of action. As Graham (2010:91) says, it would seem inappropriate for you to consider the evidence base and the perspective of the warlord before

answering his question. Yet, if you wished to provide a truthful answer that respected the subjectivist understanding of the situation, this is exactly what you would have to do. To give the warlord the answer that is correct *for him*, you may be required to inform him that torturing is morally right.

**7.6.1** In response, the subjectivist may remind us of our own moral obligations. After all, from our own perspective, we might be morally obliged to act in ways that reduce torturing and so we, morally, should respond to the warlord by stating that torture is morally wrong – irrespective of his evidence base and perspective.

**7.6.2** However, this response still concedes that we would be lying to the warlord when we told him that it was morally wrong for him to torture his critics. We would be (factually) wrong to tell him that he is making a moral error when he insists that torturing is morally right. This is very much at odds with how morality seems to work – consciously or not, we would not seem to be lying if we told the warlord that his actions were not morally right no matter his perspective, his social customs or his evidence base.

**7.7** It is open to the subjectivist to deny any claim of absurdity in regards to the implications of the position stated above. However, I am confident that few would be comfortable with the implications of subjectivism even in the light of attempted defusing explanations. Genuine mind-independence does appear to be a necessary aspect of the concept of a moral property, if we wish to deny examples of moral rightness exemplified in the actions of cruel and barbarous despots around the world. If we wish to honestly and completely deny that the warlord could ever be morally right in torturing his critics for the simple reason of his annoyance with them, from any perspective, within any culture or with any evidence base, then we must accept mind-independence, defined by a combination of stance independence and rigid truth conditions for judgments about such properties, as a necessary aspect of a moral property.

## **8. Categorical Prescriptivity – Explanation**

**8.1** Having explained and suggested a way of defending the necessity of mind-independence to the concept of a moral property, I now explain what categorical prescriptivity amounts to. I defend the necessity of this attribute to the concept of a moral property in section nine.

**8.2** In the most basic sense, something is prescriptive if it is normative and action-guiding. Thus, the following statement from a former UK Transport Minister is prescriptive<sup>6</sup>:

“There is a very strong expectation that nobody who is travelling for more than 20 minutes should be standing beyond that point”

So also is a request from MasterCard in circumstances where you have problems with your credit card<sup>7</sup>:

“...you should contact your issuing bank”

Prescriptive claims are typically formed with words such as ‘should’ or ‘ought’ and come in the form of reasons or directives.

**8.3** Categorical prescriptivity is a strong form of prescriptivity. According to Joyce (2001:42), who takes moral prescriptions to be categorical:

“If x morally ought to  $\phi$ , then x ought to  $\phi$  regardless of whether he cares, regardless of whether  $\phi$ ing satisfies any of his desires or furthers his interests.”

**8.3.1** Categorical prescriptivity can be compared with hypothetical prescriptivity. Again, according to Joyce (2001:35):

“A hypothetical imperative depends for its legitimacy on the addressee having some end or desire. “Go to the café” is good advice if I want a coffee, but if I do not have that desire, the imperative is retracted (it “evaporates”).”

**8.3.2** The difference between hypothetical and categorical prescriptions may be clear, but a short example makes it obvious. Take Daniel, who has a reason

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-29821695>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mastercard.co.uk/support/mastercard-faq.html>

to buy milk. If Daniel's reason is hypothetical, then it only applies if buying milk helps Daniel to fulfil some further desire or end. If buying milk does not do this, then Daniel would have no hypothetical reason to buy the product. However, if Daniel's reason for buying milk is categorical, then the reason persists irrespective of any of Daniel's desires or ends. Categorical reasons exist independently of prudential concerns.

**8.4** There is one further distinction that must be made between types of categorical reasons. Mackie (1977:75) referred to institutional categorical reasons. Joyce (2001:37), using the example of etiquette as discussed by Foot (1972) outlined an example of such an institutional categorical reason:

“Etiquette may demand, categorically, that I do not speak with my mouth full, whether I wish to or not.”

As Foot (1972:311) said:

“...behaviour does not cease to offend against...etiquette because the agent is indifferent to [it's] purposes and to the disapproval he will incur by flouting [etiquette reasons]”

Etiquette reasons are categorical because they apply irrespective of the desires or ends of a diner, but *institutional* because they are derived from a particular system of rules relating behaviour standards in a specific context or setting.

**8.4.1** Such institutional categorical oughts only provide reasons to agents if those agents care about, or are an active part, of the institution that generates the oughts. Joyce (2001:37) suggested that:

“...I only have a reason to refrain from speaking with my mouth full if I have some independent reason to be following the dictates of etiquette.”

The independent reason to follow the dictates of etiquette can be categorical or hypothetical, but if it is categorical then it must be non-institutional if it is to be truly independent and put an end to a further regression involving a requirement to provide an independent, non-institutional, categorical reason.



Categorical reasons can thus be institutional and grounded in a specific practice, or non-institutional and apply regardless of any commitment to abiding by the standards of a specific practice.

**8.5** McDowell (1998:17) suggests that categorical ethical reasons:

“...on occasions when they co-exist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, [are] not overriding, but silencing those other considerations – as bringing it about that, in the circumstances, they are not reasons at all.”

According to McDowell, we are rationally compelled to act in accordance with categorical ethical reasons because they silence other competing reasons. I do not build this power of silencing into the nature of a categorical prescription but neither do I suggest that McDowell is wrong either – I remain officially agnostic on the issue. I proceed without reference to the silencing power of categorical reasons from hereon in order to avoid unnecessary controversy surrounding my conception of a categorically prescriptive moral property.

## **9. The Necessity of Categorical Prescriptivity**

**9.1** According to Kant (1998:4:414), categorical reasons are the only true moral reasons. I agree with Kant in this regard, and specifically claim that non-institutional categorical prescriptivity (from here on, I drop the non-institutional prefix unless it is relevant) is necessary to the concept of a moral property.

**9.1.1** One way of characterising this statement is to say that moral reasons must apply regardless of desires or ends. However, this would be unhelpful. In some circumstances, such as with a paedophile, moral reasons apply precisely because of an agent’s desires or ends. A better way of stating the position is that categorical moral reasons obtain independently of any contingent interest, end or desire being promoted by acting in accordance with those reasons. Moral reasons do not depend on the willingness of an agent to be

concerned with either the specific reasons or the general institution from which they emerge.

**9.2** To understand why this is the case, consider the moral reasons stemming from the claim that ‘it is morally wrong to steal from your neighbour’. *Prima facie*, the moral reason not to steal from your neighbour persists regardless of any non-moral desires or end being promoted or harmed by that reason (such as the desire for a bigger television). The reason is not dependent upon any non-moral desires or ends or any willingness to be a part of an institutional moral practice.

**9.2.1** If the moral reason above was hypothetical or institutionally categorical, then we could lose the moral reason not to steal from our neighbour if circumstances were such that our desires did not involve caring for our neighbour’s welfare or abiding by the general laws of the land – or if we opted out of the moral institution. Just as Daniel would lose his hypothetical reason to buy milk if he was no longer thirsty, so we would lose hypothetical moral reasons if our desires and ends were sufficiently altered.

**9.2.2** Given that the very function of morality seems to be to deal with how we ought to live, it would be very odd if it turned out that moral reasons to avoid great harms actually ceased to apply to the very people who might most be in need of such reasons. Those who desire to kill, maim or harm – and lack any desire to be concerned with the morality of their actions – could escape from being rationally compelled by moral reasons, if moral reasons were hypothetical, just in virtue of lacking a desire to avoid killing, maiming or harming. In addition, such people could also escape from a reason to avoid killing, maiming or harming if they failed to care for the institutions issuing prescriptions against killing, maiming or harming; without a categorical reason to care about the institution (that itself must be non-institutional, in order to avoid regress) such an individual could rationally opt-out from concern about such institutionally-issued prescriptions. However, this does not seem to be

correct - we do not take moral reasons to be contingent upon desires or ends, optional or available for rejection by deplorable individuals.

**9.3** Despite this, Foot (1972) did view moral reasons as hypothetical. Foot (1972:316) suggests:

“It is often felt, even if obscurely, that there is an element of deception in the official line about morality”

Foot (1972:312) did not take moral reasons to be stronger than the reasons provided by institutions such as etiquette:

“People may indeed follow their morality or etiquette without asking why they should do so, but equally well they may not. They may ask for reasons and may reasonably refuse to follow if reasons are not to be found.”

On this basis, Foot (1972:315) accepted that, sometimes, deplorable people lack moral reasons not to act in violent and unpleasant ways:

“If he is an amoral man he may deny that he has any reason to trouble his head over this or any other moral demand. Of course he may be mistaken, and his life as well as others’ lives may be most sadly spoiled by his selfishness. But this is not what is urged by those who think they can close the matter by an emphatic use of “ought”. My argument is that they are relying on an illusion, as if trying to give the moral “ought” a magic force.”

**9.3.1** Foot’s concern regarding the magical force found in non-institutional categorical reasons may be well placed, as I discuss in Chapter Three. However, just because a concept turns out to be dependent upon an apparently magical force it does not imply that we can deny that it is a concept in common use – metaphysical distrust should not cloud the analysis of concepts as used in ordinary practice. Thus, I agree with Joyce (2001:37) in that:

“[m]y contention is that Foot is correct about the “magical force” of strong categorical imperatives, but wrong in thinking that they are expendable to morality,

and this pattern of agreeing with one part of Foot's project and disagreeing with another, is something I share with Mackie."

Unless you are prepared to accept that moral reasons may not apply to the most deplorable agents, then you should not change your view regarding the necessity of what Foot calls the 'magical force' of non-institutional categorical reasons to the concept of a moral property. Foot's account does not fit with how most people actually engage with morality as a system for guiding the behaviour of all, not merely those who opt-in to the institution. If there are ontological issues associated with such reasons, these problems cannot take those reasons out of ordinary currency by themselves.

**9.4** Shafer-Landau (2005:111) is concerned by such a rejection of Foot's view:

"If Joyce is correct, then this forces us to say that Foot has changed the subject – she's no longer speaking of morality. That surely is a verdict of last resort."

Shafer-Landau believes that Foot would have changed the subject, if Joyce is correct, because Joyce claims that categorical prescriptivity is necessary to the concept of a moral property while Foot discusses properties that are only hypothetically prescriptive.

Olson (2014:17-18), in a footnote, also suggests that the same concern has been voiced to him:

"An anonymous reviewer asked whether this commits error theorists to holding that Brink, along with Foot and Williams...lack a proper grasp of morality."

However, as Olson (2014:17-18) then says:

"...I believe common sense is on the side of...the error theorists."

**9.5.1** Beyond Olson's brute, if fair, response it is also possible to explain the reasons behind Foot's and others' mistakes. Foot's error is not egregious if we keep in mind her concern with the ontological status of non-institutional, categorical moral reasons. In trying to respond to worries regarding the 'magical force' of such reasons, while attempting to vindicate at least some

moral claims, Foot arguably altered the concept of a moral reason beyond acceptable recognition. This is a danger for anyone wishing to salvage an apparently troubled entity – indeed, for illustration only, some may say that former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair only saved the Labour Party from being unelectable by reforming it beyond all recognition, such that New Labour was no longer a version of the original left-wing party at all. Foot is guilty of an analogous mistake here in attempting to save morality, inadvertently turning moral reasons into non-moral reasons.

**9.5.2** If, as Shafer-Landau suggested, the above is a verdict of last resort against Foot and her sympathisers it does not stop it from being a defensible and ultimately correct verdict. Indeed, one may wonder why it does not equally trouble Shafer-Landau to claim that I, Mackie and Joyce have a mistaken understanding of moral properties – one group has to be wrong.

**9.6** Independent evidence is required in order to cast doubt upon the view that moral properties are not necessarily categorically prescriptive. Finlay (2008) has attempted to offer just such evidence. Finlay (2008:16) takes moral discourse to be “nonfundamental” in nature and moral properties to be non-categorically prescriptive. Finlay (2008:16) reaches this position via an analysis of how people actually seem to engage with one another on a moral level:

“Were a person to come to accept fully that another does not share her fundamental moral concerns, would she bother to address her moral claims to him? Would she have any expectation that by doing so she may succeed in influencing him? And would she bother to engage in a moral argument with him? I think that it is clear that at least many of us would not, viewing moral discourse with the morally alien as a fruitless waste of time and effort.”

**9.6.1** Perhaps Finlay’s analysis suggests that moral aliens do not have the same moral reasons that we have and that, therefore, moral reasons are not categorical. For example, the fact that I may not bother engaging in a moral debate with a farmer in a distant land over his treatment of animals, in the way that I would engage with a more local farmer, might indicate that I am

not confident that the distant individual has the same moral reasons as those within the same moral institution and locality as myself.

**9.6.2** However, such evidence is far from convincing. We must be clear on the difference between choosing to actually engage with a moral alien in order to convince them to alter their behaviour and accepting that such an individual actually lacks reason to change their moral behaviour. For purely pragmatic reasons, we may not engage in debate with those who we, intellectually, do take to have moral reasons to act differently – for engaging may be a waste of time and effort. Moral aliens, such as the warlord from section seven, may be very unlikely to listen to us and then reconsider their stances. We may believe that the warlord has a moral reason to stop torturing, but we would be unlikely to bother to engage him in a moral argument even given this moral belief. This is because he would be unlikely to hear us out and we also would very likely be concerned for our own safety. Situations are not always so extreme, but pragmatic reasons can often explain a lack of engagement with others – lack of engagement is not evidence that we do not take moral aliens to have the same moral reasons as ourselves and those close to us.

**9.6.3** Indeed, those who have naively tried to engage in a public debate on a medium such as Twitter learn very quickly of the pointlessness of trying to engage with those who fundamentally disagree with you on a given topic. After a few discussions that go nowhere, it is easy to begin to ignore such individuals and cease to have any interest in debating them. This silence and lack of effort is not evidence that we take such people not to have the same moral reasons as ourselves, it is a physical representation of our limited energy. Given that moral reasons, on my account, obtain independently of any contingent interest being promoted by acting in accordance with them, it is no surprise that moral aliens might often remain impervious to our cries to change behaviour – the interests of moral aliens may not be promoted by doing so.

**9.7** In this section, I defended the view that moral properties are non-institutionally categorically prescriptive. I stand with Joyce (2001) and Mackie (1977) against Foot (1972) and Finlay (2008), amongst others. The defender of non-categorically prescriptive moral reasons lacks convincing evidence against the strong intuition that if moral reasons exist at all, they apply categorically and regardless of whether or not they promote a desire, interest or end of a particular agent. In addition to being necessarily mind-independent, moral properties are necessarily categorically prescriptive.

## **10. Motivational Prescriptivity – Explanation**

**10.1** In section five, I made clear that I did not take motivational prescriptivity to be *necessary* to the concept of a moral property. Mackie (1977:104), however, seemed to suggest the opposite:

“...something’s being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it.”

That something’s being morally good *tells* a person to pursue it refers to the categorical prescriptivity discussed in sections eight and nine. Something’s being morally good *making* someone pursue it relates the idea of motivational prescriptivity.

**10.2** In formal terms, motivational prescriptivity can be explained thusly. A property is motivationally prescriptive if, upon and because of recognition of that property, an individual is motivated to act in accordance with the normative prescription of that property.

**10.2.1** For example, moral rightness is motivationally prescriptive if, when I recognise the property, I am motivated to do the morally right thing at least in part *because of this recognition*. Moral rightness would not be motivationally prescriptive if I could recognise something as morally right without being moved at all by this recognition.

**10.3** As with my agnosticism on the McDowellian suggestion that categorical reasons silence hypothetical reasons, I remain agnostic on the necessary motivational power of motivationally prescriptive properties. I accept that motivationally prescriptive properties could foster overwhelming or defeasible motivations to act in accordance with the prescriptive direction of associated with the property. I proceed with the weaker understanding, that motivationally prescriptive properties produce defeasible motivations, in order not to court unnecessary controversy.

### **11. Motivational Prescriptivity as Strictly Unnecessary**

**11.1** Motivational prescriptivity would not be an undesirable characteristic for a moral property to possess. A moral property that could motivate, even defeasibly, anyone who recognised it would be a potent property indeed. However, I concur with Joyce (2001:17) that this feature is not necessary to the concept of a moral property.

**11.2** This denial might seem to be in tension with my claim in 9.2.2 that the function of morality is to prescribe how we ought to live. Motivationally prescriptive properties would be even more successful in guiding behaviour than merely categorically prescriptive properties.

**11.3** However, motivational prescriptivity is far less obviously at the core of moral thinking than is either mind-independence or categorical prescriptivity. Although Mackie refers to the property itself as motivating action, rather than judgments about the property, for his suggestion to be at all plausible Mackie must have in mind moral judgments as being necessarily motivating when such judgements are made about mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral properties; if this was not the case, then moral properties would seem to be able to motivate without any recognitional requirement. Thus, the Mackian suggestion is at least partially captured in the debate



between motivational internalists and motivational externalists. Motivational internalists do claim, per Joyce (2001:18), that:

“It is necessary and a priori that any agent who judges that one of his available actions is morally obligatory will have some (defeasible) motivation to perform that action”

Motivational externalists of course deny this claim. Yet, while their debate may seem to track this issue, many motivational internalists are expressivists when it comes to moral talk and, therefore, would not be keen to ascribe this characteristic to moral *properties*.

**11.3.1** However, even if I am incorrect and motivational prescriptivity is necessary to the concept of a moral property my error should not have implications for this thesis beyond the boundaries of this section. This is because in Chapter Three I argue that we should not accept the existence of mind-independent and categorically prescriptive moral properties in part due to their metaphysical queerness. If it is actually the case that moral properties are also motivationally prescriptive of necessity, then this would not reduce their queerness. Rather, this would enhance the queerness of moral properties. Therefore, even if I am mistaken in denying the necessity of motivational prescriptivity to the concept of a moral property, the arguments in Chapter Three should not be weakened by this error. If the mistake was reversed, and I claimed that motivational prescriptivity was necessary to the concept of a moral property when it is, in fact, not necessary, then the waters of Chapter Three would be unnecessarily muddied. On this basis, from here on, I do not attribute motivational prescriptivity to the concept of a moral property.

## **12. Conclusion**

**12.1** I began this chapter by outlining the target conclusion of MET. I refined the original Mackian (1977) conclusion in line with Pigden’s (2010) discussion,

thereby protecting MET from various technical, rather than substantive, problems.

**12.2** Next, I made clear the three part MET dialectic, involving a defence of cognitivism prior to conceptual and ontological analysis of putative moral properties.

**12.3** Rather than attempting to provide a novel defence of cognitivism, I followed Joyce (2001) and Wedgwood (2007) in order to make clear the plausibility of the view that moral judgments are descriptive, attempt to refer and are truth-apt.

**12.4** In the remainder of the chapter, I engaged in conceptual analysis in order to fix the necessary features of a moral property. I defended the view that moral properties are necessarily mind-independent and categorically prescriptive. I did not concur with Mackie (1977) that moral properties were also necessarily motivationally prescriptive.

**12.5** In virtue of the above, I have set the terms for the analysis of moral properties in Chapter Three. The question that defines that Chapter is the question of whether or not we should accept the existence of the type of moral property outlined in this chapter. If we should not accept that such properties exist, then we should not accept the truth of any non-negative moral proposition that would be made true by the existence of a moral property.

**12.6** In Chapter Two, I focus on moral experience rather than on the nature or ontological status of moral properties. I defend an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience that informs discussion of the 'moral data' in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Two: The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Moral Experience**

### **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In the previous chapter, I argued that mind-independence and categorical prescriptivity were necessary features of genuine moral properties. In making this argument, I considered how morality is *used* by ordinary people. In this chapter, I focus on how morality is *experienced*; suggesting an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience. The conclusions regarding our experience of morality in this chapter buttress the claims regarding usage made in Chapter One and further justify the focus in Chapter Three upon mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral properties.

**1.2** I begin by considering the potential pay-off from the study of moral experience, as well as making clear how the study of such experience might proceed.

**1.3** The substantive debate regarding the proper characterisation of moral experience is initially set up by contraposing obviously moral and obviously non-moral experiences. After demarcating obviously moral from obviously non-moral experiences, I outline a challenge from Sinnott-Armstrong (2008) to the effect that there is no common experiential signature between disparate moral experiences; that there is no necessary or sufficient experiential condition that ties all and only moral experiences together.

**1.4** Responding to this challenge, I present both historic and contemporary accounts of moral experience. I suggest that while it appears that no previous statement of what a moral experience amounts to is sufficient to overcome Sinnott-Armstrong's challenge, these accounts do point in a promising direction.

**1.5** In outlining my own account I argue that it is necessary and sufficient for an experience to be moral that a person experiences a bearer of moral value as being either *categorically worthy of condemnation* or *categorically praiseworthy*. Specifically, such worthiness must not be experienced as being dependent upon any personal preferences or social customs. I defend and further explain this view via discussion of apparently hard cases.

**1.6** Finally, I make clear the implications of this chapter for the arguments in Chapters One and Three.

## **2. The Benefit of Considering Moral Experience**

**2.1** According to Horgan and Timmons (2005:72):

“...there is no sense in dwelling on phenomenological description of moral experience unless there is some *prima facie* reason to think that it will yield at least modest dividends in normative moral theory, metaethics, or both.”

This conditional is not obviously correct. Understanding the nature of moral experience may be a valuable end in itself, irrespective of any instrumental payoff in other areas – we may simply find it valuable to gain an improved knowledge of our own moral experience.

**2.2** It might also be suggested that a proper understanding of moral experience will support those who favour the existence of moral properties. So, Loeb (2007:470) says:

“It is widely thought that the objective-seeming nature of our moral experience supports a presumption in favour of *objectivist* theories (according to which morality is a realm of non-relative facts or truths).”

If our moral experiences turn out to be similar, then this might suggest that genuine moral properties ground those experiences.

**2.2.1** However, Kirchin (2003:244) is unsure of just how much impact an account of moral experience should have on our ontological assessments:

“...I think that if any advantage is given here to a position [in virtue of a description of moral experience], it will turn out to be highly defeasible.”

**2.3** Whether or not Kirchin, or the holder of the view described by Loeb, is correct is an issue that waits until Chapter Three. The experiential conclusions drawn from this chapter should inform the thinking in Chapter Three, whilst also somewhat buttressing the conclusion of Chapter One. However, the specific implications of my account of moral experience upon Chapters One and Three cannot be made clear until section nine. Although discussion of the payoff of this chapter is deferred, it should be clear that the value of this chapter is not *purely derived* from increasing our understanding of the nature of our moral experience – there will be a metaethical payoff in addition to this.

### **3. Employing a Phenomenological Method**

**3.1** According to Sinnott-Armstrong (2008:85):

“Phenomenology is not a doctrine. It is a method. The method is simple: describe the phenomena. More precisely: introspect on your own experience and then describe what it is like to have certain kinds of experience.”

Properly understood, phenomenology is a *method* of enquiry, with experience the *subject* of that enquiry.

**3.2** In order to study ‘experience’, we must be clear what this term refers to, especially in the moral context. There have been several attempts to characterise precisely what target is when studying moral experience:

**3.2.1** According to Kriegel (2008:1), moral phenomenological study involves:

“...the first-person study of the experiential aspect of our moral life.”

**3.2.2** Mandelbaum (in Horgan and Timmons 2005:58) suggests:

“...a direct examination of men’s moral consciousness.”

**3.2.3** Horgan and Timmons (2005:58), following Nagel's (1974) terminology, themselves refer to:

“[T]he what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experiences.”

**3.3** Whilst we may wonder what constitutes a ‘concrete’ or a ‘non-concrete’ moral experience, the above suggestions illuminate what is meant by ‘moral experience’ at least in broad terms. The proper subject of moral phenomenological study is the first-person, what-it-is-like quality of moral experience.

**3.4** If first-person moral experience is the proper subject of moral phenomenological study, then there is an apparent problem facing anyone engaging in such study. It is a hefty assumption to judge that general conclusions about the moral experiences of others can be drawn from any analysis of our own, personal and subjective, moral experiences. It is quite possible that our own personal moral experiences have a unique character and would fail to resonate with the moral experiences of others. This general sceptical concern cannot be ignored when we engage in the study of experience, but it afflicts all phenomenological descriptions to at least some degree and not merely my account especially.

**3.4.1** There are at least three broad phenomenological methodologies that can be employed in the study of moral experience and each copes differently in the face of the general sceptical concern above. Below, I outline these different approaches and make clear which are favoured in this chapter.

**3.5** *Introspective Phenomenological Method*: Gill (2008:101) suggests that this method for studying experience, both moral and non-moral, involves:

“...[attending] as closely as possible to one's own experience and then to do the very best job one can of describing that experience accurately.”

The introspective method suggests that we consider our own experience, describe it in the sharpest terms possible and test to see whether such experience is representative of the experiences of others also. If our

personally described experience is representative, then general conclusions can be drawn from descriptions of such experiences.

**3.5.1** As stated, the introspective method seems open to the sceptical concern sketched in 3.4. However, this does not entail that this methodology is without merit. If we describe our experience as sharply as possible, then it should be fairly easy to test whether or not such described experiences are generally representative – others can simply compare the description offered with the character of their own experience. This process should yield progress whether or not the experience described actually turns out to be representative, for either the experiential description will be representative or we can gain understanding from analysis of why it turns out not to be so generally representative. The introspective method, at worst, pushes us closer towards understanding what does and does not count as a representative experience (if anything does) in a given context – it provides at least one data point even if more data points may be desirable in order to illuminate a clear pattern.

**3.6** *Questionnaire Phenomenological Method*: Once again Gill (2008:100) provides a statement of this method:

“The questionnaire approach would have us develop a phenomenological account by asking a large, representative sample of ordinary people questions about their experience of morality.”

The premise of this method is, roughly, that many armchairs are better than one – the questionnaire approach throws together many introspective descriptions of personal experiences in order to attempt to establish a representative picture from them. While one well described experience may count as a single data point, the questionnaire approach attempts to bring multiple data points together in order to establish a stronger data-set.

**3.6.1** Nichols and Folds-Bennett (2003), along with Goodwin and Darley (2008), have both adopted this method when studying moral experience. In attempting to ascertain whether or not a coherent structure to moral

experiences across individuals can be found, different groups, including children, have been questioned as to the nature of their moral experiences.

**3.6.2** This type of method reduces the impact of the sceptical concern described in 3.4, since any one particularly parochial description of moral experience would be obviously located as an outlier against a backdrop of more representative experience descriptions. Indeed, by specifically asking “ordinary people” questions about their moral experiences, rather than philosophers who may be committed to particular moral views, the descriptions of moral experience that surface may be more likely to be representative, as ordinary people are more immune from the risk of having their experiences coloured by theoretical commitments.

**3.7** *Historical Phenomenological Method*: Gill’s (2008:102) third suggested method for gathering descriptions of experience involves:

“...[examining] works by philosophers with different theoretical commitments [in order to] gain some purchase on the question of the extent to which experiences of morality share some universal phenomenological features.”

This method might be described as a version of the questionnaire phenomenological method, since it involves bringing together descriptions of moral experiences from different sources in order to identify any core features. However, rather than relying on ordinary people, the historical method focusses on the experiential reflections of philosophers. Given that philosophers are skilled and practiced in the processes of reflecting and considering, there is at least a *prima facie* reason for optimism regarding their ability to describe their moral experiences more sharply than the folk. Of course, it may turn out that philosophers are not better off than ordinary folk in describing *representative* moral experiences, but the best test of philosophers’ moral descriptions is open-minded evaluation rather than an *a priori* judgment regarding their strengths or weaknesses.

**3.8** The three methods described are not entirely independent – introspective reflections form the basis of both the questionnaire and historical methods.



Indeed, introspecting on the nature of moral experience might also help to set the questions to be asked of others in questionnaires, as well as helping us to judge whether or not a plausible common experiential narrative can be woven together from a variety of historical descriptions of moral experience.

Introspective analysis of experience is not, therefore, a redundant activity if we wish to understand the nature of moral experience.

**3.8.1** The introspective method forms the backbone of this chapter in respect of my defence of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience. However, I do not specifically address any sceptical worry attached to this method from this point. Perhaps, if my conclusions do accord with the experiences of the philosophical community, questions could then be asked of 'ordinary people' as a final test of their representativeness. I do not, however, ignore historical phenomenological discussion and my account is also informed by suggestions from some of those philosophers who have considered the issue before me. Thus, the historical method precedes and informs my introspectively reached conclusions. The historical accounts of moral experience that inform my discussion are outlined in section six.

**3.8.2** The central conclusion of this section is that while it may be tempting to engage with ordinary people via questionnaires in order to avoid parochial and unhelpfully subjective descriptions of moral experience, the introspective phenomenological method has a crucial role to play and is not an obviously flawed mechanism for capturing the finer aspects of representative moral experiences. If my suggested phenomenological descriptions are not representative then this issue will at least be out in the open.

#### **4. Preliminary Demarcation of Moral Experience**

**4.1** It is useful to make some preliminary demarcations between obviously moral and obviously non-moral experiences in order to set at least rough

boundaries for the discussion to come. After all, one needs a handle on what constitutes a moral experience in order to make clear the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience.

**4.2** The following are paradigmatic examples of varying types of moral experience:

Moral anger at a thief

Moral pride in doing something helpful for another person

Moral assessment of the appropriateness of eating meat for dinner

Moral decision-making, such as deciding to give to charity

Moral assessment of the tax arrangements of a multinational company

**4.3** The following are examples of obviously non-moral experiences:

Anger at a football referee not awarding your team a penalty

Pride in beating a personal best time when jogging

Assessment of the quality of a student essay

Making a decision to eat pizza, not pasta, for lunch

Assessment of the latest fashion trends exemplified on the high street

**4.4** It is worth noting that even the most paradigmatic of moral experiences is only partly constituted by moral elements. For example, in addition to any moral quality of the experience, when I make a decision to give to a charity collector on the street because I wish to relieve the suffering of the individuals whom the charity supports, I will also experience the feel of loose change in my pocket, the ambient air temperature and a host of other things. These aspects of my wider experience do not add any moral character, but they are a part of an experience that is in the 'moral class'.

**4.4.1** Equally, when considering the moral rightness of meat-eating as you are faced with a beefburger, you may notice the confused face of your companion as you consider the issues rather than dive into the food. This recognitional aspect of your experience is non-moral, but the broad experience itself be placed into a 'moral class'.

**4.5** The important lesson is that moral experiences need not be purely describable in moral language. Moral experiences, in addition to their moral character, will also have non-moral experiential components. However, while non-moral features of moral experiences will vary greatly across different experiences, the key focus in this chapter is to ascertain whether or not there is an aspect of experience that is common to all and only moral experiences; whether or not there is a common experiential signature to distinctly moral experience.

## **5. Apparently Disunified Moral Experience**

**5.1** The most pressing problem facing any attempt to unify moral experience around particular necessary and sufficient conditions is the *problem of diversity* as laid out by Sinnott-Armstrong (2008:88). He claims:

“I doubt that we can say anything interesting about the phenomenology of moral thinking in general. There is just too much diversity among moral judgments and among the kinds of topics those judgments are about.”

In short, the lack of a common experiential signature among moral experiences undermines the thought that there is anything experientially unique to all and only moral experiences.

**5.2** There is some plausibility to the view that moral experiences are too disunified for there to be a common experiential signature to them. Sinnott-Armstrong (2008:89) continues:

“...various areas of morality feel very different. Anger does not feel anything like disgust, contempt, and distrust.”

There seems to be nothing, experientially, common between these very different types of moral experience. As Sinnott-Armstrong and Wheatley (2014:460-1) state:

“Moral judgments within various areas of morality feel different. When you see someone jump into a raging torrent to save a drowning child and judge that heroic act to be morally good or ideal, your positive feelings of admiration and awe feel nothing like your negative emotions when you witness or hear about a rape.”

**5.3** Further examples buttress the point. There seems to be nothing experientially common to the moral experiences of:

1. Deciding that it would be morally right to give money to a homeless person on the street
2. Moral anger at being kicked
3. A feeling of moral betrayal when you find out that a friend has lied to you
4. Disapproving of a student who has plagiarised an essay
5. Taking moral pride in a ‘community hero’ award for a member of your family

**5.3.1** The list of varying moral experiences could be endless, but the point is clear enough. Moral experiences appear so diverse that it would seem foolhardy to attempt to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience. As Kriegel (2008:8) puts it:

“There are many phenomenally conscious states that occur on a Wednesday, but there is no Wednesday phenomenality. It might be worried that, likewise, although there are many phenomenally conscious moral mental states, there is no moral phenomenality.”

That there are many moral experiences is something that all accept, but there may be no experiential features linking these disparate experiences together.

## **6. Previous Unification Attempts**

**6.1** Sinnott-Armstrong may not be convinced that any common experiential signature for moral experience exists, but there have been previous attempts to identify just such a feature. Below, in line with my claim to utilise the historical phenomenological method, I summarise some of these previous suggestions.

**6.1.1** According to McNaughton (as described by Loeb 2007:472):

“Morality seems to be in the world apart from our happening to encounter it, not something that depends for its existence on our subjective inputs. We seem to have moral perceptions, which...seem to be of something outside of us.”

**6.1.2** Gill (2008:103) describes the view of Bishop Butler:

“...the experience of morality is phenomenologically inseparable from the experience of normative authority.”

**6.1.3** Horgan and Timmons (2005:60) outline the view of Mandelbaum:

“...the demand characteristic of direct moral judgments is ‘reflexive’ – it is directed against the agent making the judgment – and its origin is experienced as independent of the agent.”

**6.1.4** For their own sake, Horgan and Timmons (2005:69) suggest:

“...categoricalness (however this idea is to be spelled out precisely) is characteristic of typical moral experience.”

**6.2** These views have enough commonality to allow the drawing of a substantive, if rough, picture of moral experience (assuming, as I do for the sake of argument, that these views from different philosophers in different eras capture at least some of the key qualities of moral experience). What I label the ‘orthodox’ view of moral experience states that an experience is moral if and only if a part of the experience involves a *categorical, external, normative authority*.

**6.2.1** Horgan and Timmons (2005:61), speaking of Mandelabum, illuminate the external aspect further:

“...the agent experiences the felt demand as resting upon, or evoked by, the apprehension of fittingness – rather than the other way round.”

What unites moral experience seems to be an experience of something being categorically prescribed, of fitting the world (where this means a demand made to agent for something to be the case), and of this all being determined by an external normative authority.

**6.3** This account of moral experience seems plausible if we test it against some examples of obviously moral experiences. Consider the cases below.

**6.3.1** *Case One:* As part of your job you are required to fill in an enormous amount of paperwork. However, you know that many of the long-winded forms that you complete will never be read by any other person, let alone be of practical benefit. Yet despite this, you cannot escape the sense that your promise to your boss that you would complete the forms means that you morally should do so. Acting in line with this moral prescription seems to be demanded by ‘an external normative authority’ in spite of your subjective desire to put the forms into the shredder; putting the forms into the shredder would not seem to fit how the world ought to be and would be something akin to pushing an incorrect piece of a jigsaw puzzle into the wrong location.

**6.3.2** *Case Two:* You are walking down the street and notice what appears to be a stray dog. Returning later in the day, the dog is still in the same place. Faced with the prospect of leaving the dog to fend for itself in the cold and rain, you feel morally obliged to offer the hound some sanctuary before rectifying the situation for the longer-term in the morning. You also feel moral anger towards the person who has apparently abandoned the dog. You sense that it runs afoul of an external normative authority to act in such a way; that the world demands different behaviour. You feel morally compelled to act in spite of subjective worries regarding the prospect of being told off by your

husband/wife for bringing the bedraggled creature through the door, for this is an action that just seems to fit the world appropriately.

**6.4** Both cases one and two seem to be captured by the orthodox account of moral experience. Parts of both experiences involve experience of fittingness, moral direction and an external normative authority. However, there remains something to Sinnott-Armstrong's (2008:89) worry that:

“[w]hen I introspect on this variety of cases, it is hard for me to find anything interesting that is common or peculiar to these moral experiences.”

The use of common language in the two different experiential descriptions may be cheating us of a full and fair attempt to provide clear experiential description of the two cases. While the linguistic descriptors employed may be similar, the actual experiences may be quite different – with that difference hidden by over-reliance upon opaque experiential descriptors such as ‘normative demand’ or ‘external authority’. References to these abstract notions may superficially place moral experiences into a single experiential category, but that placement may be justified only by shortcutting full descriptions of the two experiences. In essence, we may be applying common linguistic terms to distinct experiential phenomena.

**6.4.1** It has already been accepted that the non-moral qualities of moral experiences will differ on a case by case basis. However, it is important not to sidestep potential differences in the moral character of the experiences based on (inadvertent) word-trickery. Sinnott-Armstrong (2008:91) worries that by referring to the “fittingness” associated with moral experiences, such differences in the character are being so ignored:

“...if the experience of moral thinking is described in terms that are broad enough to cover all moral cases (such as “fitting”, or “approval”), then they...do not refer to introspectively identifiable feelings.”

While we might suggest that an experience of normative authority is common to all and only moral experiences, there may be no phenomenologically

salient experience of normative authority – the term may be referring to distinct experiential phenomena and falsely bringing disparate moral experiences into a single experiential category.

**6.5** As it stands, the doubt raised by Sinnott-Armstrong’s worry has not been vindicated. For all that has been suggested, the orthodox view of moral experience may pick out genuinely experiential elements unique to all and only moral experiences. However, rather than defend the orthodox view as it stands, I offer a refined account of moral experience in section seven that should cope with the problem of diversity. The lesson to keep in mind in that section is that it is important to use language carefully when describing experience and thereby avoid belittling experiential difference by falling back on the safety blanket of terminological commonality.

**6.6** There is one further problem for the orthodox view of moral experience that must be considered in this section. Take two further examples.

**6.6.1** *Case Three:* You are working hard in order to complete an individual project. You have met your target output for the day and begin to watch television. However, while watching another re-run of ‘Antiques Roadshow’ you are nagged by the thought that you ought to be doing more work. Such work seems to be demanded of you, and even though you desire to relax you sense that an external normative authority is directing you back to the laptop.

**6.6.2** *Case Four:* You are listening to a guest speaker give a talk. You come to believe that the speaker is misrepresenting the views of your favourite 19<sup>th</sup> century bushy-moustached German philosopher, though you accept that the misrepresentation is both inadvertent and is located in what is considered to be an academically respectable line of thinking. However, despite this, the speaker’s behaviour does not seem to accord with an external normative authority – an authority that seems to call for the interpretation of the thinker that you believe to be correct.



**6.7** In these cases, even if references to external normative authority (amongst other things) are accepted to be references to genuine features of experience, neither of the experiences would seem to count as being moral. Another example of a similar situation might be that of a fridge door that ‘demands to be opened’ due to a craving on your part – yet the fact that opening the door would seem to be fitting, or accord with the call of an external normative authority, does not add any moral character to this experience. Equally, when looking at the sum of 2+2 it might seem that an external normative authority compels you to write ‘4’ rather than any other number after the equals sign, but again this experience does not seem to be moral in any way. Thus, the orthodox account of moral experience does not suggest a plausible sufficiency condition that, if fulfilled, would make an experience a moral experience – experiences can seem to have the qualities outlined and yet still be non-moral in nature.

**6.7.1** As stated, the problem of sufficiency may not seem to be too serious. If the orthodox view captures the necessary conditions for an experience to be moral, then this would still seem to be a valuable outcome. However, not forgetting the earlier concern based on the problem of experiential diversity, I suggest that the orthodox view of moral experience requires refinement. In the next section, I offer my account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience.

## **7. Necessary and Sufficient Conditions**

**7.1** According to Sinnott-Armstrong and Wheatley (2014:462):

“...our brief survey of the most common proposals [attempting to unify moral experience] makes it hard to imagine how any phenomenological description could capture anything that is common and peculiar to all areas of moral experience”.

**7.1.1** My contention is that there *is* such a single important experiential feature that is common to *all and only* moral experiences. My account of the

necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as being a moral experience proceeds by splitting discussion of moral experience into two categories – *positive* and *negative*. The following are the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a positive, or a negative, moral experience.

**7.1.2 Positive Moral Experience:** It is necessary and sufficient for an experience to count as a positive moral experience that a person experiences something – be it a person/act/object/state of affairs etc. – as being *non-institutionally categorically praiseworthy*. That is to say, no aspect of their experience suggests that this praiseworthiness is born of personal preference or social custom. Rather, the person/act/object/state of affairs is experienced as praiseworthy in a way that would appear to persist regardless of personal tastes (*who* has the experience) and regardless of the social context or setting (*when* and *where* the experience is had); anyone encountering the person/act/object/state of affairs *should have the same experience* of praiseworthiness.

**7.1.3 Negative Moral Experience:** It is necessary and sufficient for an experience to count as a negative moral experience that a person experiences something – be it a person/act/object/state of affairs etc. – as being *non-institutionally categorically worthy of condemnation*. That is to say, no aspect of their experience suggests that this worthiness is born of personal preference or social custom. Rather, the person/act/object/state of affairs is experienced as worthy of condemnation in a way that would appear to persist regardless of personal tastes (*who* has the experience) and regardless of the social context or setting (*when* and *where* the experience is had); anyone encountering the person/act/object/state of affairs *should have the same experience* of worthiness of condemnation (*the ‘non-institutional’ categorical prefix is assumed from here on*).

**7.2** Initially, these conditions may not seem to be plausible, let alone correct. The most obvious problem stems from the apparently over-cognitive nature

of the requirements; too much specific conscious thought seems to be required in order for an experience to count as being moral. In addition, Sinnott-Armstrong's problem of diversity remains, built on the worry that my conditions may not pick out genuine features of experience – after all, it is not obviously clear what it is to experience something as categorically worthy of condemnation, for example. This is not even to mention the possible impact of the problem of sufficiency.

**7.2.1** I do, later in this section, respond specifically to the suggestion that my account suffers from being overly cognitive. However, a full response to the latter potential problems described above for my account of moral experience must wait until section eight. For now, I intend to make clear some of the virtues of my account on admittedly friendlier terrain – hard(er) cases will be dealt with in the next section. To begin, consider the experience described below.

**7.3** *Case Five*: You are watching television and see an advert asking for donations to improve water supplies in Less Economically Developed Countries. You experience sadness at the plight of those without access to clean water – this is at least plausibly a non-moral experience. However, you also experience those working to rectify the situation as being *categorically praiseworthy*.

**7.3.1** What it is to experience another person as being categorically praiseworthy becomes clearer if we compare it with our experience of someone as being praiseworthy, but non-categorically so. For example, you may experience your boss as being praiseworthy if she succeeds in getting a letter published in a prominent national newspaper. However, your experience of your boss and of the aid worker will be different, even though both are experiences of somebody as being praiseworthy. This difference is *direct* – it is not based on experiential differences in the experiences more broadly construed, but in the very way in which we experience the two individuals as being praiseworthy. I suggest that what explains this

experiential difference is that, in the case of your experience of your boss, the social grounding of the experience of praiseworthiness colours the experience *as it is lived*, or as we experience it. Your boss is experienced as being praiseworthy only because it is a social custom to praise literary ability and a willingness to engage in public debate – the experience seems to be related to an understanding that the praise is grounded in an *institution* as per discussion of institutions in 8.4 of Chapter One. Conversely, in our experience of the aid worker, there is categoricity to the experience of praiseworthiness that does not apply in your experience of your boss. The aid worker is experienced as morally virtuous in a way that would persist independently of possible changes in subjective judgment or social custom – the aid worker has acted in a manner that is *non-institutionally* categorically praiseworthy. This explains why your experience of your boss is different to your experience of the aid worker, despite the fact that you experience both individuals as being praiseworthy.

**7.4** The following two examples should make the experiential difference clear in respect of negative moral experiences and negative experiences more generally. Consider the difference between experiencing a person as *categorically* worthy of condemnation and experiencing a person as merely worthy of condemnation.

**7.4.1 Case Six:** You are driving along the motorway on your way to watch an important football match. In front of you is a driver who, by obeying the speed limit, is holding you up. Annoyed, you experience the driver as worthy of condemnation.

**7.4.2 Case Seven:** You are driving along the motorway on your way to watch an important football match. As you drive, you witness another driver zoom past you doing 100mph whilst also talking on his mobile phone without any hands-free device. Upset at this recklessness, you experience the driver as being categorically worthy of condemnation.

**7.4.3** A plausible statement of the experiential difference between these two cases, purely in respect of our experience of the two drivers, is that in case six the driver is condemned *qua road user* while in case seven the driver is condemned *qua person*. In the former case, the driver is condemned as an obstacle on the road, in the same way that we might condemn traffic jams or traffic lights that block our path; the driver is condemned for the non-moral functional role that he occupies. In the latter case, the driver is condemned as a bearer of moral value, as someone who is acting wrongly. Crucially, he is experienced as a bearer of moral value precisely because he is experienced as categorically worthy of condemnation; he would not be the subject of a moral experience were he not experienced in this way (as is the situation in case six).

**7.5** Detailing the experiential difference between non-moral and moral experiences of praiseworthiness and worthiness of condemnation via philosophical reflection may seem to produce an answer both overly cognitive and long-winded. However, the mere fact that an explanation of the character of an experience relies upon cognitive processes that appear lengthy when written down is not a problem if we keep in mind that such cognitive processes could be sub-conscious or habitual for an agent at the moment that they have an experience. Cognitive complexity in explanation of apparently simple experience is not only plausible, but to be expected given that the character our experience is at least partly shaped by our background beliefs and our cognitive processes. For example, when I witness both my dog and another dog wallowing in mud together, I experience my dog differently to the other dog – in part because I know that my dog is my responsibility. This sub-conscious judgment alters the character of my experience, for while the other dog is experienced as an object of amusement I experience my dog as most certainly worthy of condemnation. Experiential simplicity suggests nothing in respect of a ‘beneath the waves’, sub-conscious, cognitive simplicity.

**7.6** Any remaining concerns regarding the overly cognitive nature of my account of moral experience should be quelled by the final example of this

section. This example also makes clear an important virtue of my account, in that it makes clear how my account copes with moral experiences that might be very short in duration. It also suggests that we might have many more such temporally short moral experiences than we might otherwise have thought.

**7.6.1 Case Eight:** You are spending your lunch hour catching up on work in the communal dining area. A colleague near you is drinking a glass of red wine and inadvertently spills her drink all over your papers.

**7.6.2** I propose that the following description properly captures the changing nature of this experience, in a temporally short period of time.

1. Immediately after the spilling, you experience the papers as being completely ruined.
2. You then experience the wine-spiller as being categorically worthy of condemnation *qua person*. This experience is not tempered by any sense that the condemnation is grounded in mere personal annoyance. On the contrary, the wine-spiller is experienced *in the same way as the driver in case seven* – as someone that all should condemn.
3. Next, you experience the look of horror and shame on the face of the wine-spiller as well as viewing their efforts to quickly contain the damage by mopping up the spilt liquid.
4. As a result of this, your experience of the wine-spiller as described in 2 begins to change. Although you continue to experience the wine-spiller as worthy of condemnation for their recklessness, you no longer experience them as being categorically worthy of condemnation. Your experience now is of a person who is like the driver in case six who blocked your path. No longer do you experience the wine-spiller in the same way that you experienced the driver in case seven.
5. Finally, you experience the wine-spiller as someone deeply upset by the events and you recognise that they are about to cry. Feeling sympathy with them and accepting that all of us make mistakes, you no longer even

experience the wine-spiller as worthy of condemnation. Instead, you experience them as someone to be comforted and reassured.

**7.6.3** An experience of the same event shifting in character over time is not uncommon and it is a virtue of my account that this experiential reality is accounted for. Of course, if the case were to be described differently, if the wine-spiller was instead experienced as being blasé about their act, then the moral character of the experience may persist for far longer, or the final stage of experiencing the wine-spiller as a person to be comforted might not be reached. My account of moral experience explains these subtle experiential differences that regularly occur in our lives.

**7.6.4** Case eight also provides a wider lesson. It suggests that we have many more, temporally short, *moral* experiences than we might otherwise have imagined. The fact is that when someone stamps upon our foot, or fails to hold open a door for us, we may condemn that *tout court*, in the way described in 7.1.3, far more often than we might think at least in the immediacy of the moment. This experience of condemnation, if it is how I have described it and if it has a categorical edge, means that we have a moral experience. In addition, this discovery also highlights a potential shortcoming of the questionnaire phenomenological method, for the type of deep reflection required to pick out such moral experiences may require genuine philosophical reflection rather than a quick piece of form filling by non-philosophers. Such non-philosophers - without seeking to impugn the reflecting ability of individuals filling out questionnaires - may not pick out the fact that they condemn individuals *tout court*, if only briefly, in what are accepted as being trivial circumstances. Instead they may be more likely to focus on the more lasting experience of simply being annoyed in virtue of a social custom when, for example, someone fails to hold a door open for them.

**7.6.5** This case also casts further doubt over on the 'overly cognitive' worry. Clearly, we need not deliberate in the immediate aftermath of the wine-spilling as to whether or not the wine-spiller is categorically worthy of

condemnation. However, our experience can certainly be informed by an immediate, sub-conscious, cognitive assessment of the situation, of which the judgment of worthiness of categorical condemnation could be a part. If I can judge that my papers are ruined and have this inform my experience immediately, then I can judge the culpability of the wine-spiller and have this also immediately inform my experience.

**7.7** It is important also to make clear before concluding this section that my account of moral experience does not have any normative implications – particularly against any utilitarian view that seeks to split judgments of rightness and wrongness from judgments of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. Since my account is purely a descriptive account of moral experience, it remains perfectly possible to experience a person as categorically worthy of blame without, at the level of reasons, judging that such a person has acted morally wrongly.

**7.7.1** Take the following as illustrative of this point. You may have a moral experience when you experience a cheating sportsmen as being categorically worthy of condemnation. However, you may also subscribe to a normative moral system that suggests that the action of the sportsmen was not morally wrong. There is nothing implausible about a disconnect between our immediate experience and our reflective judgments, though we might expect that over time such a disconnect would be minimised as our experiences fall in line with our more reflective judgments. Perhaps, in the wake of a civil rights movement, someone may have experienced a black man sitting down at the front of a bus as an act categorically worthy of condemnation without, at the same time, judging the act to be morally wrong – the moral experience may have resulted from a habitual hangover of past belief that a person will take time to fully dissociate themselves from.

**7.8** The cases described in this section have been designed to make clear the mechanics of my account of moral experience. I have demonstrated the plausibility, and some of the virtues, of the account of the necessary and



sufficient conditions for an experience to count as a moral experience as laid out in 7.1. I have also responded to the worry that those conditions were overly cognitively complex. In the next section, I defend the plausibility of my account in the light of apparently harder cases and with reference to the problems of diversity and sufficiency in particular. I begin by responding to the latter potential problem.

## **8. Hard Cases**

**8.1** In 6.7, I suggested that the orthodox account of moral experience failed to outline sufficient conditions for an experience to count as being a moral experience. For the problem of sufficiency to afflict my account, all that would be required would be a single example of a non-moral experience that involved an experience of something as being categorically worthy of condemnation or praise. The following two cases suggest that this objection may be merited.

**8.2 Case Nine:** A person suffers from a particular psychosis, such that they experience trees, television remote controls and trains as objects categorically worthy of condemnation. They experience these objects in precisely the same way as the reckless driver was experienced in case seven.

**8.3 Case Ten:** On a trip to the rest rooms at work you come across the contents of an unflushed toilet. Annoyed by the lack of basic manners of the previous user, you experience the culprit as being categorically worthy of condemnation.

**8.4** I am happy to bite-the-bullet and accept that psychosis sufferers as described in case nine are having moral experiences when they experience the described objects in the described ways. We might, at the level of reason, take such people to be mistaken in viewing those objects as genuine bearers of moral value (this might be expected in Case Nine as the character is stated as suffering from a *psychosis*) but their mistake is not of a different type to

other apparent mistakes that people make when experiencing something in a moral way. Unfortunately for the psychosis sufferer, their mistake is so extreme that they have very few allies who share their experience and so the moral character of their experience might be unfairly questioned by those who do not experience the object in the same way.

**8.4.1** I am also happy to bite-the-bullet and accept that the character described in case ten has a genuinely moral experience. The fact that some moral wrongs would be more serious than others is not an alien concept, but we should not find it strange that we would have moral experiences in relation to even trivial apparent moral wrongs. We may not experience the culprit in this case in precisely the same way that we would experience a Hitler-figure, but this does not imply that the experiential-type is different. In addition, as per the wine-spiller case, the individual in case ten may have a temporally short moral experience that dissipates into an experience of a socially or personally grounded condemnation not long after the event.

**8.5** The problem of diversity still requires a response. Despite the examples both above and in the previous section, it might still be objected that abstract word-play is covering up important differences in experience in cases of moral experience. The examples below are further attempts to respond to this worry, as they specifically highlight the experiential similarity that persists across quite different backdrops for moral experience.

**8.5.1** *Case Eleven*: You are watching a clip of Martin Luther King on television. You have a moral experience in taking Martin Luther King to be a brave and principled person.

**8.5.2** *Case Twelve*: You are in a rush to get to the shops before closing time but you cannot locate a space to park. Noticing the panicked look on your face, a fellow shopper lets you take an available space even though they were ahead of you in the queue. You have a positive moral experience of the other driver in virtue of their kindness.

**8.5.3** *Case Thirteen:* You survey a newly built school in a previously deprived part of your local town. Watching students enter the new buildings, you feel moral pride in this development.

**8.5.4** These three moral experiences vary greatly in their non-moral components. However, despite these differences, the experience of something (person/object/state of affairs) as being categorically worthy of praise persists across all three cases. Imagine cutting this experiential feature out of the three cases described above – doing so would seem to remove the distinctly moral aspect of the experience. If, for example, you experienced Martin Luther King as being brave in the way that you experience a boxer as being brave, or you experienced pride in the school development in the same way as you experienced pride when finishing a difficult crossword, then you would not seem to be having moral experiences. The fact that you are having moral experiences in cases eleven, twelve and thirteen suggests that there is a common experiential component – the *categoricity* of praiseworthiness that I have been outlining. You experience Martin Luther King, the driver in the car park and the school development as people and objects categorically worthy of praise rather than merely worthy of praise. The cases hitherto discussed across sections seven and eight also bear this experiential description out.

**8.6** However, if some moral experiences are more trivial than others (as was accepted in 8.4.1), then it may make it harder to defend a claim of experiential commonality between these experiences. After all, it seems that someone is either experienced as categorically praiseworthy or they are not – this does not appear to be a finely graduated condition for experience. If it is the case that our moral experience of Hitler is different to our moral experience of the wine-spiller or the non-flusher, then there may be less commonality across moral experiences than I have suggested.

**8.6.1** Experiential graduation can occur in different ways in different contexts. An experience of sweetness can be caused by either a sugar-coated scone or a spoonful of honey, but the experience can be stronger or weaker depending

on the impact of the objects upon our taste buds. There is experiential commonality between the experiences of sweetness, but such commonality does not rule out graduation. In the same way in the moral setting, a moral experience may be stronger (when of a Hitler-figure) or weaker (when of the non-flusher) because it is, perhaps, temporally longer or shorter, or because it is accompanied by stronger emotions (such as anger) or weaker emotions (such as annoyance). Indeed, it might be that when challenged about our moral experience of the non-flusher we are more likely to accept that our experience is non-veridical, whereas when challenged about a Hitler-figure we are less likely to accept that our experience is non-veridical – in stronger cases we cling to the ‘correctness’ of the moral experience more than in weaker cases where we are content to admit a phenomenological error may have occurred. Whether strong or weak, however, in the moment of experience there remains an experiential commonality between moral experiences in so far as someone or something is experienced as categorically worthy of praise or blame.

**8.7** A different type of objection may come from a subjectivist of the type outlined in Chapter One. This objector might question the necessity, rather than the sufficiency, condition outlined for an experience to count as being moral. The example below makes clear the potential basis for this objection.

**8.7.1** *Case Fourteen*: You are walking home from work when you witness a person throwing rubbish onto the pavement. You experience the litterer as a person worthy of condemnation, but your experience of the litterer seems to stem from your own person distaste for litterers.

**8.7.2** The subjectivist might claim that the above is a moral experience even though it lacks a condition I have thus far argued is necessary for an experience to count as being moral – the litterer in this instance is not experienced as being categorically worthy of condemnation.

**8.7.3** However, there are good reasons to doubt the subjectivist interpretation of case fourteen. Firstly, if this interpretation were correct,

then we should find no difference in experiential type between our experience of the litterer, our experience of a thief and our experience of a Hitler-type figure. It is correct that these moral experiences could be stronger or weaker in the ways suggested in 8.6.1, but they should be of the same experiential type. This does not seem correct. My experience of a violent criminal seems to be different in type to my experience of the litterer in the case as described in subjectivist terms.

**8.7.4** Rather than simply relying on experiential assertion, however, the intuition behind the above case can be captured without thereby undermining the necessity condition of my account. Consider what a genuinely moral experience (on my account) akin to case fourteen would be like.

**8.7.5** *Case Fifteen:* You are walking home from work when you witness a person throwing rubbish onto the pavement. You experience this act as being categorically worthy of condemnation and this condemnation is experienced in a way that would seem to persist independently of your own tastes or social conventions.

**8.7.6** There is nothing in the description above that suggests that an experience of categorical condemnation of an act, person, object or state of affairs could not neatly accord with an experience of condemnation that is grounded by our own personal tastes or social conventions. A personally grounded dislike of litterers would explain an experience of condemnation that persists independently of any moral experience – but it just so happens that we might often experience litterers as worthy of categorical condemnation in any case. Litterers, like wine-spillers, are sometimes the subjects of our moral ire as well as objects about which we are personally annoyed. Indeed, like wine-spillers, sometimes we have moral experiences of litterers and sometimes we do not; my view again captures this feature of our experiential lives.

**8.7.7** The subjectivist is mistaken not for thinking that personal tastes can lead to experiences of condemnation or praise, but for thinking that this is

sufficient for an experience to be moral without the further categorical quality of the experience. Personal taste may lead to an experience of condemnation independent of any moral factor, but neither personal tastes nor social conventions can ground moral experiences alone.

**8.8** A non-subjectivist objection to the necessity condition for an experience to count as being moral, as outlined in 7.1, is also possible. Consider the following example highlighting this worry.

**8.8.1** *Case Sixteen*: You have a long-standing feud with your neighbour, whom you think has behaved very rudely over a number of years. Your neighbour has consistently left rubbish on their drive, and not been concerned when it has been blown onto your garden. However, after many years of not dealing with the situation, your neighbour finally knocks on your door and offers to clear any rubbish that has infiltrated your garden. You take this to be a morally right act and have an associated moral experience.

**8.8.2** In this case, the moral experience does not seem to be properly explained by suggesting that you experience of either your neighbour, or of his act, is one of categorically praiseworthiness. Nothing about his behaviour seems to engender *praise*, even if you judge him to be doing the morally correct thing (at last); your neighbour is not due praise because he is belatedly correcting a situation that he created.

**8.8.3** In this case, it is important to remember the relevancy of categoricity to the experience. Certainly, you may not feel that your neighbour is worthy of *your personal praise*. However, this is not to say that you do not experience his act as being *categorically worthy of praise* as an act that, in isolation, is morally correct. You may not feel particularly grateful for this overdue act, but you may experience the act as one that – beyond your own personal feelings – is worthy of praise on its own terms. To be clear, I refer to an *experience* of categorical praiseworthiness in this example not merely a non-phenomenological *judgment* of categorical praiseworthiness that you accept regardless of more subjective sentiments. You genuinely experience his act as

one that is categorically praiseworthy regardless of your latent personal animosity. Just as your personal preferences and sentiments can fall in line with your moral experiences, so too they can become separated as in the case above – your neighbour is not someone that you feel personally inclined to praise, but he is someone that you experience as *categorically* worthy of praise, at least in this instance.

**8.9** There is one final type of possible moral experience that requires comment. Consider the example below.

**8.9.1** *Case Seventeen:* You are hypnotised into feeling a sensation of categorical condemnation whenever you encounter someone wearing a blue jumper. However, as part of the psychological manipulation, you forgot that a hypnosis event has occurred. When you see a person in a blue jumper, you experience them as worthy of categorical condemnation – but you cannot explain why this is the case even when you reflect.

**8.9.2** It might be thought that this is a non-moral experience since you have no moral reason underpinning or supporting your experience, even on a sub-conscious level. You condemn, but you do not know why you condemn.

**8.9.3** However, as is now a common theme, I am happy to bite-the-bullet and call this type of experience a moral experience. Our inability to justify this experience at the level of reasons does not change the moral character of the experience itself as it is lived. Indeed, one way of engaging in ‘moral development’ might be to engage in the process of better aligning our moral experiences and our moral judgments at the level of reason. Despite this possibility of moral development, it does remain the case that at the experiential level a moral experience is a moral experience – whether or not we think that such an experience is appropriate or whether or not we can explain the presence of the experience to ourselves. Our ability to self-reflect does not alter whether or not a given experience is, or is not, moral.

**8.10** The necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to be of a moral type, as outlined in 7.1, are therefore plausible even in the light of the problem of sufficiency, the problem of diversity and hard cases. Indeed, such hard cases have helped to further explain some of the virtues of my account as well as the ways in which moral experiences can be stronger or weaker.

## **9. Relevant Implications**

**9.1** That we experience bearers of moral value to be categorically worthy of praise or blame sits neatly with my view that the moral properties that most people commit themselves to are mind-independent and categorically prescriptive. There is a pleasing coherence between my account of how we use moral properties and my account of how we experience moral properties. Moral value is experienced as ‘out there’, as something we seem to refer to and as categorically grounded.

**9.2** This ‘pleasing coherence’ does not entail that the expressivist cannot explain this type of moral experience – there is no entailment from my account of moral experience to the cognitivist description of moral language and psychology put forward in Chapter One. However, it is clear that Chapters One and Two are, at the very least, not in tension.

**9.3** In Chapter Three, I utilise this account of moral experience as part of a ‘moral data set’ – through which the best explanation of such moral experience can be located. Specifically, I assess whether the presence of mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral properties best explains our moral experience, or whether or not we can explain such moral experience without positing those moral properties. The expressivist will hope that I am correct in Chapter Three that we need not posit moral properties in order to explain moral experience, but must still find a way to challenge the conclusions of Chapter One.



## **10. Conclusion**

**10.1** This chapter began with consideration of the possible value of studying moral experience. Having explained potential payoffs, I outlined different phenomenological methods and made clear that the introspective method would be the backbone of this chapter, supported by both historic and contemporary descriptions of moral experience.

**10.2** Next, I offered a preliminary demarcation of moral experience from non-moral experience. Following this, I made clear how the problems of diversity and sufficiency caused trouble for the orthodox view of moral experience.

**10.3** I then provided my own necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as being a moral experience. I defended this account against a worry that such conditions were overly cognitive, as well as against the problems of sufficiency and diversity. I also tested my account of moral experience against supposed hard cases.

**10.4** Finally, I made clear that my account of moral experience fits neatly with my account of how we use moral properties as made clear in Chapter One, before outlining how my account of moral experience informs Chapter Three. In the next chapter, the issue is not how to understand moral experience, but how to explain moral experience and other aspects of the wider moral data set. The next chapter comprises the final step of MET, as I argue that we have no good reason to accept the existence of moral properties in our world.

# **Chapter Three: The Best Explanation of Moral Data**

## **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In Chapter One I made clear, amongst other things, that according to MET no non-negative moral proposition is ever true. In this Chapter, I provide the final argumentative step that vindicates this claim.

**1.2** Specifically, I argue that moral properties (defined as mind-independent, categorically prescriptive properties as per Chapter One) are not a part of the best explanation of what I refer to as the 'moral data'. Instead, I argue that such moral data is better explained without reference to moral properties.

**1.3** Below, I begin by making clear what the moral data amounts to. Following this, I outline 'moral property' and 'purely evolutionary' explanations of this data. I accept that both explanations of the moral data are explanatorily powerful but argue that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is superior because it is both less ontologically committing generally and also less ontologically committing in respect of positing queer entities.

**1.4** I conclude on the basis of this and previous chapters that MET is vindicated and that we should accept that all non-negative moral propositions are false; we should not accept the existence of truth-making moral properties in the world. This conclusion is of value both in itself and in so far as it raises a key question regarding how we should act in a world where no non-negative moral claim is ever true – this question drives the remainder of my thesis.

## **2. The Moral Data**

**2.1** The case for accepting or rejecting moral properties should be based on how well those properties explain a set of data. In this section, I make clear

what the data to be explained by both defenders and opponents of moral properties amounts to.

**2.2** The moral data that I focus on is outlined below:

- 1) Moral Experience
- 2) Private Moral Thinking and Public Moral Discourse
- 3) Moral Agreement
- 4) Moral Disagreement

This list is not supposed to exhaust all aspects of the moral data and there may be other ways in which we seem to interact with morality that I do not discuss herein. However, the list is representative if not exhaustive. Making clear which of a moral property based, or a purely evolutionary based, explanation better explains this data set makes clear which of these explanatory accounts is the better explanation overall. Conclusions drawn in respect of explanatory success of the data set identified are sufficiently indicative of wider moral data explanatory success. Below, I explain what each of the aspects of the moral data set amounts to in practice.

**2.3** *Moral Experience*: In Chapter Two, I defended an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an experience to count as being a moral experience. Whether or not my particular account is correct, the general fact that we have moral experiences is clear. There is a class of experience that counts as being 'moral' – even if the boundaries for this class may be up for debate and may, according to Sinnott-Armstrong (2008), be extremely fuzzy. To use a simple example, when I eat a slice of cheesecake I do not have a moral experience, but when I watch an advert asking for donations to help maltreated animals I do have such an experience.

**2.3.1** For my purposes here, it does not particularly matter if moral experience is as stated in the previous chapter, or if moral experiences are consistent in nature across time or between people. What matters is that,

broadly speaking, moral experience exists and its *presence* (not its *structure* in this chapter) requires explanation.

**2.4 *Private Moral Thinking and Public Moral Discourse:*** As well as having moral experiences, we also think in moral terms in a more abstract way. Below are some examples of moral thinking:

1. *Considering* which action to undertake based on what we take to be the moral course
2. *Assessing* the morality of our past actions
3. *Reflecting* on the morality of another person's actions

**2.4.1** Clearly, there is some crossover between this category and the category of moral experience – for when we assess the morality of our past actions we are very likely having a type of moral experience. However, it is worthwhile discussing moral thinking outright because it is incumbent upon both the defender and the opponent of moral properties to explain both the prevalence of moral thinking and the fact that we seem unwilling to give up thinking about the world in moral terms. As Mackie (1977:49) says, it is necessary to explain how:

“...people not only might have come to suppose that there are [moral properties] but also [why they] might persist firmly in that belief.”

**2.4.2** Private moral thinking finds expression in public moral discourse as well as public moral discourse making its own impact upon private moral thinking. According to cognitivists, as made clear in Chapter One, this public moral discourse is semantically characterised by truth-aptness. According to Shafer-Landau (in Sher 2012:120):

“Moral talk is shot through with description, attribution, and predication.”

It would not be fruitful to rehearse the debate between cognitivists and expressivists, as was detailed in Chapter One, here. In this Chapter I simply assume that opponents and defenders of moral properties must be able to

explain the apparently descriptive and referential nature of ordinary moral discourse.

**2.4.3** In addition to the above, another feature of public moral discourse that requires explanation is our willingness to draw moral inferences and make apparently logically valid moral arguments. For example, people often engage in the following type of moral reasoning:

1. Stealing is morally wrong
2. If stealing is morally wrong, then we morally ought not to steal

Therefore,

C. We morally ought not to steal

This aspect of public moral discourse is exemplified in real world circumstances every day. Responding to the crisis of immigrants drowning as they attempt to cross the Mediterranean in search of mainland Europe, the BBC reported the Right Reverend David Walker as making the following type of moral argument<sup>8</sup>:

1. Britain's foreign wars have been morally costly
2. If Britain's foreign wars have been morally costly, then we are morally obliged to help those who have been burdened by our morally costly wars

Therefore,

C. We are morally obliged to help those who have been burdened by our morally costly wars

Both the defender and opponent of moral properties must explain our propensity to draw moral inferences and make moral arguments.

**2.5 Moral Agreement:** Moral agreement may be only a by-product of private moral thinking and public moral discourse, but it also requires specific

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32471030>

explanation. Despite the many different cultures and societies that exist around the world, there is a considerable amount of moral agreement. Consider the following brief examples.

**2.5.1** The political organisation, social customs and median incomes of the UK and Thailand are very different. However, the view that ‘paedophilia is a moral wrong’ would gain near universal assent in both countries.<sup>9</sup>

**2.5.2** The 21<sup>st</sup> century is very different to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, despite this, a significant level of moral agreement can be found between St. Thomas Aquinas and those who sought to justify, or oppose, the 2003 Iraq War. Aquinas, according to Cole (1999:67), took war to be just only when it was declared by a just authority, had a just cause and was fought with a rightful intention. Many of the judgments made in the build up to the 2003 Iraq War were precisely about whether or not the war had been declared by a just authority, whether it had a just cause and whether or not it was being fought for rightful intentions.<sup>10</sup>

**2.5.3** There are plentiful examples that could be provided of moral agreement between peoples and cultures that, in many other ways, are quite distinct. It is not necessary here to establish precisely how much agreement there is, since it is clear that the level of moral agreement is non-trivial. Given this, moral agreement requires explanation.

**2.6** *Moral Disagreement*: In addition to moral agreement, moral disagreement is also common and also requires specific attention. Below, I make clear some of the causes of moral disagreement.

**2.6.1** *Ignorance of non-moral facts*: Two individuals can disagree morally without there being any difference in their background moral beliefs if at least one of them is ignorant of relevant non-moral facts. Take an example.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1566720/Thailand-police-arrest-suspected-paedophile.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/04/iraq>

**2.6.1.1** Scott and Sheila agree that it would be morally wrong to purchase coffee from any coffee house that engages in aggressive tax-avoidance. However, Scott mistakenly believes that the coffee house before them is such a business, while Sheila knows that it is not. The moral disagreement between the two regarding whether it would be morally appropriate to purchase coffee from the store is based entirely upon Scott's ignorance of relevant non-moral facts.

**2.6.2** *Ignorance of future consequences:* In a similar vein, two individuals can morally disagree because they are ignorant regarding the future consequences of a given action. Take another example.

**2.6.2.1** Scott and Sheila both agree that they morally ought to give money to charity in order to relieve the suffering of poorer children in LEDC's. Scott believes that they morally ought to give money to charity A rather than charity B, because doing so will promote a morally better outcome. Sheila, on the other hand, favours charity B for the same reason. Their disagreement is based not on a difference in moral values, but on an ignorance of how best to promote those values in their future practice.

**2.6.3** *Application of a Moral Rule/Principle:* Not all moral disagreement is based upon ignorance of non-moral facts or future consequences, some moral disagreements are based on different interpretations of moral rules/principles. Take a third example.

**2.6.3.1** Scott and Sheila both agree that we have a moral duty to engage in the democratic process by voting. However, while Scott believes that spoiling a ballot paper sufficiently discharges this moral duty, Sheila does not. Both agree on the broad moral principle, but disagree on how best to apply that principle in practice.

**2.6.4** *Primacy of a Moral Rule/Principle:* As well as disagreement based on how best to apply a moral rule/principle, individuals can also disagree over

the primacy of different moral rules/principles as highlighted by the example below.

**2.6.4.1** Scott and Sheila agree that we have moral duties to both respect foreign cultures and protect the innocent. When faced with the prospect of an innocent person being condemned for a crime that they did not commit at the hands of their fellow citizens in a foreign land, Scott and Sheila disagree over the moral course of action. Scott feels that their moral duty to protect the innocent trumps their moral duty to respect foreign cultures, while Sheila holds that the reverse is correct. Thus, this moral disagreement is based on disagreement over the primacy of different moral rules/principles.

**2.6.5** *Deep Moral Principles*: The most extreme form of moral disagreement occurs when we disagree on the most fundamental moral level, as shown in the example below.

**2.6.5.1** Scott and Sheila disagree over the morality of a suggested tax cut. Scott believes that cutting tax where possible is a moral duty because government lacks the moral right to spend other people's money, except in extreme circumstances. Sheila, meanwhile, believes that raising tax where possible is a moral duty because the government can then spend on projects that make many people's lives better. Deep disagreement over moral principles is, perhaps, the 'full fat' version of moral disagreement.

**2.6.6** It is incumbent upon those who would either defend or oppose the existence of moral properties to make clear how they can account for moral disagreement in these varying forms, since as with moral agreement, moral disagreement occurs to a non-trivial degree in a variety of contexts.

**2.7** As noted in 2.2, the above is not an exhaustive account of the moral data. However, the moral data set demarcated above is sufficiently representative so as to justify a stance in favour of the account that better explains the data set. If positing, or rejecting moral properties better explains the moral data set as identified then this justifies accepting or rejecting the existence of



moral properties depending on which explanation is more successful. What follows from here is an explicit argument to best explanation, with the moral data set the target to be explained.

### **3. Competing Explanations**

**3.1** There are many ways in which the moral data set could be explained. Consider just two.

**3.2** *Explanation One:* Aliens, currently orbiting the planet in an undetectable ship, have implanted switches into our brains. At the discretion of these aliens, the switches can prompt either a moral experience or a moral thought with specific content.

**3.3** *Explanation Two:* There is an undetected gas that, when we contact it, causes either a moral experience or a moral thought (or both).

**3.4** These two candidate explanations of the moral data are bad explanations. Exactly why they are bad explanations is an issue I tackle in section seven. For now, however, it is important to recognise one explanatory virtue that explanations one and two do possess. Both explanations are explanatorily *powerful* in the sense that they sufficiently explain the moral data, on their own terms. That is to say, all aspects of the moral data are explained by explanations one and two – they leave no explanatory gap. For any question that you could ask of how explanation one accounts for moral disagreement, for example, the defender of explanation one would have a coherent and internally consistent answer (involving a brain switch). If these explanations are poor, as they surely are, then their failings are not due to a lack of explanatory power.

**3.4.1** It is important to recognise the above for two reasons. Firstly, it is not sufficient for an explanation of the moral data to be the best explanation of the moral data that it is explanatorily powerful in the sense described above;

different explanations of the same data can be equally explanatorily powerful. However, it is highly plausible (if not necessary) in the context of explaining the moral data, that the best explanation be extremely explanatorily powerful. I do not wish to advocate a methodological principle that suggests that explanatory power is the *primary* decider for working out which explanation of some data set is best, or that an explanation cannot be the best explanation even if it slightly less explanatorily powerful than a rival, but it is certainly of central importance for an explanation to be powerful in the way described.

**3.5** Over the final sections of this chapter, I consider the two genuine contenders to the throne in respect of being the best explanation of the moral data – the moral property explanation and the purely evolutionary explanation. I begin with the former.

#### **4. Moral Property Explanation**

**4.1** The moral property explanation of the moral data posits mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral properties. Below, I take each aspect of the moral data in turn and offer the moral property based explanation of that data.

**4.2** *Moral Experience*: If moral properties exist, then our coming into contact with them would easily explain our having of moral experiences. Just as our experience of pizza is explained by our actually coming into contact with mind-independent pizzas, so our moral experiences could be explained by our actually coming into contact with moral properties.

**4.2.1** It is worth noting that this explanation of moral experience is, at the very least, in tension with the ‘property-less’ account of moral experience that I provided in Chapter Two. However, if this is the case and the moral property explanation of the moral data turns out to be the best explanation, then so much the worse for my account of moral experience.

**4.3 *Private Moral Thinking and Public Moral Discourse:*** If moral properties exist, then their presence might be taken to explain our propensity for moral thinking. However, the mere fact that *x* exists is not generally taken to be sufficient to explain our thinking about *x* – there are plenty of existents that we have never thought about and many that we think about only on very rare and specific occasions.

**4.3.1** In order to explain moral thinking via reference to moral properties, it must be the case that moral properties exist, that we are aware that they exist and that we care about them existing - for if we did not care about moral properties, it is not clear why moral thinking would be so commonplace. I consider our ability to know about moral properties in 4.4.

**4.3.2** If moral properties did exist, then we should expect to find that people care about them as a matter of fact. Moral properties would be categorically prescriptive, therefore providing reasons for action that apply irrespective of personal concerns or social conventions. Of course, people do not always care about what they have reason to do and this problem might seem to be more acute given the mind (and desire) independent nature of moral reasons. As Blackburn (1998:70) says:

“The reason expressivism in ethics has to be correct is that if we supposed that belief, denial and so on were simply discussions of a way the world is, we would still face the open question [of what to do]. Even if that belief were settled, there would still be issues of what importance to give it, what to do, and all the rest. For we have no conception of a ‘truth condition’ or fact of which the mere apprehension by itself determines practical issues.”

As I made clear in section eleven of Chapter One, I do not take moral properties to be necessarily motivationally prescriptive, so by ‘determining’ practical issues we should only read moral properties as providing mind-independent, categorically prescriptive *reasons*. While Blackburn may be correct that the concept of a fact that determines practical issues by offering such mind-independent, categorically prescriptive reasons is a strange

concept (see section eight), this strangeness does not, by itself, suggest that moral properties/facts would not be facts that most people would be greatly interested in if they existed. While it is correct that even after the recognition of such reasons we may still face a question of how we *will* act, we would no longer face the question of how we *morally should* act. Given our propensity to question exactly how we *should* act in a great many different circumstances, the direction offered by moral properties would be intellectually attractive and something that would very likely frame both behaviour and debates surrounding how to behave. In the light of the direction they offer, most people would likely be uncomfortable ignoring such apparently helpful, action-guiding, moral properties. Thus, if moral properties did exist and most people were aware that they existed then their presence would seem to explain both private moral thinking and public moral discourse – the apparent helpfulness of moral properties in guiding behaviour would explain both of these personal and public events.

**4.3.3** In addition to making clear how moral thinking would be explained by moral properties, it is also necessary to make clear how moral properties could explain the aspects of public moral discourse described in 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 – namely, our willingness to make semantically truth-apt, referential, descriptive moral claims and our willingness to engage in logical moral reasoning.

**4.3.4** If we were aware of existing moral properties, then this fact would explain our descriptive, assertive and truth-apt moral language. In engaging in public moral discourse, we would be attempting to accurately describe the distribution of moral properties in the world - we would be attempting to describe moral features of the world. Indeed, if we knew that such properties existed, it would be bizarre if public moral discourse was not as described in 2.4.2.

**4.3.5** In addition, the existence of moral properties would also explain our propensity to engage in logical moral reasoning. If moral properties existed

and through our moral expressions we attempted to describe their distribution in the world, then claims involving moral propositions would have the same semantic structure as other truth-apt, assertive judgments that are subject to rules of inference such as *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*. In this circumstance, there would be no reason for us not to engage with moral propositions in the same way as we engage with non-moral propositions when forming arguments or drawing conclusions. Thus, the existence of moral properties that we knew and cared about would sufficiently explain both private moral thinking and the elements of public moral discourse outlined in sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3.

**4.4 Moral Agreement:** The existence of moral properties would also explain moral agreement if it is granted that we have at least some epistemic access to such properties. If such limited epistemic access to moral properties was granted, then the issue of knowing about moral properties that was mentioned in 4.3.1 as it pertained to private moral thinking and public moral discourse would also be resolved.

**4.4.1** However, the above is a big ‘if’. Mackie (1977) was very concerned that our epistemic access to moral properties would not be a simple matter, and certainly not as simple as our epistemic access to other types of more regular properties. According to Mackie (1977:38):

“...if we were aware of them [moral properties], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”

This special method for accessing moral properties is required because of the strange natures of moral properties themselves – an “utterly different” faculty is required for what Mackie takes to be an utterly different type of property; I discuss the “utterly different” qualities of moral properties further in section eight.<sup>11</sup> Mackie (1977:39) was clear that positing such:

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting at this stage that I side with Joyce (2006:199) in rejecting the idea that moral properties could be natural properties. Without pre-empting the discussion of section

“...‘a special sort of intuition’ is a lame answer, but it is one to which the clear-headed objectivist [defender of moral properties] is compelled to resort.”

**4.4.2** There are several possible responses to this Mackian concern regarding our epistemic access to moral properties. A view criticised by Harman (1998) suggests that we could perceive moral properties in much the same explanatory way as we perceive other properties and that no such special intuitive faculty is required. However, this is not a debate that I wish to enter into here. I accept, for the sake of argument, that if moral properties exist then our epistemic access to them is reliable to at least some meaningful degree. Such epistemic access would explain moral agreement across times and cultures (as well as playing a crucial role in explaining private moral thinking and public moral discourse) for there would be a moral truth around which moral judgments and opinions could coalesce. Though I may be letting the defender of moral properties off somewhat easily on this particular point, I take there to be bigger problems facing the moral property explanation of the moral data. These are problems that I turn to in sections seven and eight.

**4.5** *Moral Disagreement*: Explaining moral disagreement might seem to be a bigger challenge for the defender of moral properties. Mackie (1977:36) certainly took this to be the case:

“...radical differences between first order moral judgments make it difficult to treat those judgments as apprehensions of objective moral truths.”

**4.5.1** However, the task seems not to be too difficult if, once again, we look past the potentially contentious issue of how our epistemic access to moral properties would work. All that is required for the defender of moral properties to explain moral disagreement is for us to have an imperfect epistemic access to moral properties. If our epistemic access to moral properties was imperfect, then moral agreement and moral disagreement

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eight, the *mind-independent* and *categorical prescriptiveness* associated with moral properties marks them out as being quite different to other natural properties – and I have already defended the non-negotiability of these characteristics to the concept of a moral property in Chapter One.

could be explained by the fact that some of us, sometimes, would get our moral claims correct and that some of us, sometimes, would get our moral claims wrong. When you add into the mix moral disagreements based on non-moral ignorance as described in 2.6.1 and 2.6.2, then it is clear how the defender of moral properties might explain widespread moral disagreement.

**4.5.2** Limited epistemic access to properties seems to explain disagreement in other realist discourses, such as various scientific discourses. Disagreement seems to pervade the scientific disciplines because we have a limited epistemic access to the facts that would settle these disagreements. Epistemic access to properties that lays somewhere between full and zero neatly explains both moral disagreement and moral agreement.

**4.5.3** It may still be objected that this is too kind to the defender of the moral property explanation because moral disagreement seems more fundamental, or a different type, to disagreements in other apparently realist disciplines. For example, moral disagreements might seem to be intractable in a way that other realist-discourse debates are not. As Enoch (2009:39) says:

“Perhaps the troubling worry about moral disagreement comes not merely from its being so widespread or from its persistence, but from the (apparent) fact that it persists even among rational, reasonable, sensible people.”

Deep disagreement over moral principles seems to be a different type of disagreement to that which two chemists might engage in regarding the properties of a given chemical. Indeed, the plausible fact that scientific progress has outstripped moral progress – for science has taken us to the moon, whereas in ethics it cannot be decided, for example, when, if at all, euthanasia is morally permissible – might seem to indicate that moral disagreements are of a different and more intractable type to scientific disagreements.

**4.5.4** However, whether or not this line of attack upon the moral property explanation might prove fruitful, I resist the temptation to follow it here. As in 4.4.2, I do not further discuss this potential problem for the moral property

explanation of moral disagreement because I take there to be bigger problems for the moral property explanation, to be discussed in sections seven and eight. For the sake of progress here, I grant that even if a complete explanation of moral disagreement has not yet been provided by the defender of moral properties, such an account could be given in a way that is consistent with the existence of such moral properties.

**4.6** I accept, given the discussion in this section, that the moral property explanation of the moral data is extremely explanatorily powerful. There is no aspect of the moral data that is resistant to explanation by reference to moral properties; the moral property explanation has all bases covered in respect of explaining the data set. Perhaps there are deeper explanatory problems for the moral property explanation that I have passed over in this section, but these are not issues that I will hold against the moral property explanation in the remainder of this chapter. Although I have not provided exact details of the precise realist explanations of the moral data I have made clear the basis on which these explanations may progress and could be developed.

**4.6.1** In the next section, I consider the explanatory power of the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data, in order to see if it matches the high level of explanatory power of the moral property explanation.

## **5. Purely Evolutionary Explanation**

**5.1** The fact that the moral property explanation of the moral data is extremely explanatorily powerful does not entail that moral properties best explain the moral data any more than the explanatory power of the explanations involving brain switches and undetectable gases makes these explanations the best.

**5.1.1** However, the high level of explanatory power of the moral property explanation does set the bar high for any competing explanation. If moral



properties are not going to be a part of the best explanation of the moral data, then any plausible rival must also be highly explanatorily powerful.

**5.2** The ‘purely evolutionary’ explanation of the moral data utilises resources from evolutionary theory. An entire book would be required in order to precisely explain how our evolution has led to the different aspects of the moral data set without any intervention from actual moral properties, but within this chapter it is important that I give more than a ‘just-so’ evolutionary explanation. In what follows, I seek to strike the correct balance between relying upon theoretical reasoning and calling upon empirical evidence. I can, however, promise no more than a sufficiently detailed *sketch* of a fuller explanation that remains in the offing.

**5.2.1** I spend most of this section detailing how private moral thinking emerged, before applying the discussion briefly to the other aspects of the moral data set. This is because much of the heavy lifting for the purely evolutionary account is located in the need to explain the emergence of widespread private moral thinking; once this task is discharged, explanations of the other features of the moral data flow more easily.

**5.3** *Private Moral Thinking: According to Street (2006:114):*

“...one enormous factor in shaping the content of human values has been the forces of natural selection, such that our system of evaluative judgements is thoroughly saturated with evolutionary influence.”

In order to explain private moral thinking without reference to moral properties, we must consider the (cultural, rather than genetic) evolutionary factors that favoured private moral thinking. However, explaining why natural selection would have favoured moral valuing and judging is, *prima facie*, no easy task. For one thing, the apparently altruistic character of many of our moral thoughts seems to stack the evolutionary decks against the emergence of such fitness decreasing thinking.

**5.3.1** One way of discharging this explanatory burden is to consider how moral thinking might have been useful to our ancestors. So, James (2009:107) says:

“According to the *central claim* of evolutionary antirealism, the selection process facing early humans did not shape humans in ways that improved apprehension of moral facts (if there were any); what was needed was simply improved *social cooperation*.”

If James is correct, moral thinking emerged not due to our apprehension of actual moral properties but due to the fitness improving benefits of social cooperation. Kitcher (2005:106) puts it thusly:

“At the initial stage, proto-morality is introduced as a system of primitive rules for transcending the fraught sociality of early hominids...The criterion of success isn’t accurate representation [of moral properties], but the improvement of social cohesion.”

The situation sounds similar to the picture painted by Hobbes (1994) in his discussion of the ‘state of nature’. However, while Hobbes viewed a stable (i.e. non-democratic) government/monarchy as being required to increase social cohesion, on this account moral thinking emerged as a way of helping to ensure that life was less violent, brutish and short.<sup>12</sup>

**5.3.2** Without proper empirical grounding for this picture, the idea that moral thinking evolved as a method for improving social cohesion is little more than a ‘just-so’ story. Fortunately, Mameli (2013) has, to butcher a bad metaphor, put some empirical meat on the theoretical bones. Mameli charts the need for our ancestors to hunt big-game as the catalyst for the emergence of moral thinking. Below, I briefly rehearse his account.

**5.4** According to Mameli (2013:923):

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<sup>12</sup> Apperley (1999:167)

“Large-scale cooperation, on a national or global level, does not ‘come naturally’ to us and needs to be sustained and supported by other kinds of psychological and institutional mechanisms.”

This natural aversion to large-scale cooperation presented a problem to our ancestors, when, perhaps for reasons to do with climate change or other evolutionary pressures, it became necessary to hunt large game. This need to hunt large game increased the need for large scale cooperation in respect of both bringing down an animal and then distributing the prize. Mameli (2013:921) says:

“Small family hunting units that do not cooperate with each other do not share meat and are unable to guarantee a sufficient meat intake to their members.”

Sharing meat thus became an “effective *variance reduction strategy*” in the sense of decreasing behavioural variance – those who attempted to cheat the system or bully their way to more food would be cast out of a community and back into a situation where they could not easily survive, in order for the group to maintain a functional social order. Where social order was not so maintained, fledgling social groups would not have reliably gathered and distributed the food required to survive.

**5.4.1** This requirement to punish bullies and cheaters promoted *moral* thinking because, according to Mameli (2013:921):

“[it] selected for efficient gossiping and the ability to what Boehm calls, borrowing a phrase from Trivers, “moralistic aggression” of deviants.”

Moral thinking – judging the actions and characters of others to be either morally right or wrong – grew from the need to police the catching and the distribution of large game meat.

**5.4.2** However, it might be suggested that a non-moral system promoting social cooperation was just as likely to develop. On this point, Mameli (2013:923) says that:

“...*Social Sanctioning* was initially non-moral and became increasingly more moral over time, as a result of the selection pressures in favour of cooperative hunting and resource pooling...[t]he process led eventually to the evolution of the ability to token mental states about inescapable and authority-independent calls for action of the kind that Mackie, rightly in our view, saw as essential to moral judgment.”

Yet, this explanation still leaves it somewhat opaque as to *why* categoricity would have found itself selected for in moral judgments. In explaining the emergence of the unrestricted categorically prescriptive element of moral judgments, Mameli (2013:923) states:

“In the demographic and cultural context of contemporary societies, such flexible cognitive tools can give rise to individuals who are willing to include everyone in what they take to be their moral community. It is this that generates the possibility of the kind of unrestricted moral judgment that is common nowadays and that finds expression, for example, in human rights talk.”

Moral thinking became categorical because we began to include all other individuals in our moral community as our social worlds grew wider – at first, just bullies and cheats in our own socially cooperative groups may have been deemed to be moral sinners, but as our groups widened so we learned to judge all others as members of a wider moral community. Spreading our social wings caused a spreading of our moral wings, for in a world where people can shift from one social group to another, moral punishing of cheaters and bullies in other groups becomes worthwhile - those cheaters and bullies in other groups could be members of your social group in the future.

**5.4.3** Mameli is aware of the fact that being a punisher is an act that, of itself, could decrease an individual’s fitness. It seems far better to be a free-rider and let others do the punishing, thereby opening themselves up to the risk of retribution as well as spending resources seeing the punishment through. In response, Mameli (2013:927) says:

“...it is not just that everyone disapproves of the deviant, but everyone is *expected* to disapprove of the deviant. If you do not show some disapproval of the deviant, or are

unwilling – if mandated by the band – to participate in carrying out some punitive acts or to support and protect those who have been assigned the task to carry out punitive acts, then you will be disapproved of, and such disapproval will have negative consequences on your reputation, on your chances to find good sexual partners, and on opportunities for rewarding cooperation with your band members.”

Thus, although punishment requires time and effort, there are strong pressures upon all individuals to play their part in any moral condemnation of deviants, since any individual seen as failing to ‘do their bit’ is also thereby threatened with a fitness decreasing punishment. Opting out of moral thinking was not a realistic option, especially as young members of the group would be educated into such thinking.

**5.5** Mameli’s ‘meat made us moral’ hypothesis provides a strong, empirically grounded explanation of the emergence of social cooperation and, thereby, the emergence of moral thinking. However, before moving on it is important to further buttress the explanation of the evolution of the *distinctly moral* aspect of socially cooperative thinking.

**5.5.1** According to Joyce (2006:111):

“When a person believes that an act of cooperation is *morally* required – that it *must* be performed whether he likes it or not – then the possibilities for further internal negation on the matter diminish...The distinctive value of imperatives imbued with practical clout is that they silence further calculation.”

Moral judgments are particularly useful, over and above merely non-moral recommendations, because they help to silence doubts and discussion regarding how to act. For example, knowledge that something is illegal may not stop someone acting if they feel that they will be unseen, since they may escape punishment. However, knowledge that something is morally wrong will be more likely to stop an action because of the moral condemnation that one would feel is appropriate of themselves – this is the effect of moral guilt. On this point, Joyce (2006:112-3) says:

“She can tell herself that she has done something *wrong*, that her action was *unfair* or *unjust*, that she *must* make amends, that she not only has risked punishment but *deserves* it. The emotion of guilt is available to her. In addition, she can judge that other offenders deserve punishment too – a thought that was unavailable to our previous non-moralised agent.”

The ‘practical clout’ of moral, rather than non-moral, imperatives is more potent in terms of promoting social cooperation and is therefore evolutionarily advantageous. Moral judgments are useful as strong and effective regulators of personal behaviour that benefit the wider social group.

**5.6** If Mameli (2013), along with Joyce (2006), provide an explanation of *why* moral thinking evolved and was selected for, then Joyce (2006:125) also provides an account of *how* such moral thinking might have evolved:

“...[We have a] coarse-grained answer to what natural selection did to the human brain to enable moral judgment: it manipulated emotional centres.”

Joyce refers to those who have suffered traumatic brain injuries and have, thereafter, become quite different people in respect of character changes. Specifically, such people struggle to identify differences between moral transgressions and non-moral transgressions in the same way that a psychopath might struggle.<sup>13</sup> These changes, following certain types of brain injuries, suggest that moral thinking emerges from the emotional centre of our brain – an area obviously shaped by natural selection.

**5.6.1** Joyce calls upon Wheatley and Haidt’s (2005) findings to the effect that emotional responses drive our moral experiences and our moral thinking, even if this fact is not always apparent to us. Joyce (2006:130) outlines the cases of individuals who are hypnotised into feeling disgust upon hearing a trigger word. The evidence showed that:

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<sup>13</sup> Malatesti (2009:340) says: “Recent empirical results suggest that adult psychopathic offenders, when compared to non psychopathic offenders, manifest insensitivity to the distinction between moral and conventional transgression”.

“In cases where disgust was prompted, the subjects’ moral condemnation was heightened...This is striking when one considers that there was nothing in the story remotely to support such a judgment.”

Subjects were hypnotised to feel disgust upon hearing the words ‘often’ and ‘take’. Subjects were told of a student who *often* chooses to *take* topics that appeal to students and professors in the hope of finding interesting discussions. Despite nothing of moral relevance in the story, disgusted subjects reported that:

“it just seems like he’s up to something”

“he’s a popularity seeking snob”

“it just seems so weird and disgusting”

“I don’t know [why it is wrong], it just is”

**5.6.2** The evidence suggests that, whether we know it or not, our emotions play a key role in driving our moral thinking. This fits neatly with Joyce’s suggestion that it was via manipulation of our emotional centres that natural selection was able to select for social cooperative enhancing moral judgments. In addition to the evolutionary ‘why’, we also have the evolutionary ‘how’ for the explanation of the emergence of private moral thinking.

**5.7** Having explained private moral thinking in purely evolutionary terms, it is necessary to say something about the remaining aspects of the moral data set. Firstly in respect of explaining public moral discourse, the hypothesis that public moral discourse was selected for in order to promote socially advantageous cooperation explains its apparently descriptive character. This is because an expression of an attitude is something that we can rationally choose to ignore. We may be less inclined to ignore the attitude of a powerful chieftain due to his physical control of a situation, but the choice ultimately remains with us. However, if moral discourse is grounded in the expression of apparently descriptive judgments that attempt to refer to mind-independent,

categorically prescriptive properties, then the decision to ignore a given moral prescription is not rationally down to us if we take that moral prescription to be correct. If moral discourse evolved as a mechanism to promote social cooperation, it is no surprise that it is characterised by apparent truth-aptness and apparent description of categorically prescriptive, mind-independent properties, for this adds an extra rational weight to public moral pronouncements that are designed to guide the behaviour of others.

**5.7.1** In addition, if moral discourse is as characterised by the semantic cognitivist, then it is also not surprising that we engage in moral reasoning and draw moral inferences. If we take moral claims to have the same truth-aptness as many other non-moral claims, then there would be no reason to avoid using such moral claims in arguments. Indeed, placing moral premises into arguments can be useful in advancing social cooperation. As Socrates showed, the power of a good (moral) argument is not to be ignored. The prevalence of such moral arguments in everyday life is therefore accounted for by the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data.

**5.8** As for explaining moral experience, I suggest that the account of moral experience offered in the previous chapter explains how moral experience can be understood without the need to invoke moral properties. It may, however, still be questioned why and how such moral experience *evolved*. Fortunately, Joyce (2006) offers a reasonable answer to these questions.

**5.8.1** According to Joyce, we project our moral values onto the world. This projection accords with my non-moral-property account of moral experience, because it suggests that our moral experience begins in our minds and works out into the world, rather than being caused by an apprehension of external mind-independent moral properties. Joyce (2006:128) makes clear why this projection account of moral experience makes evolutionary sense:

“The least complicated setup (*ceteris paribus*) is for a creature’s perceptual experiences to be as of a direct acquaintance with aspects of the world, as if one’s senses are but open windows to reality, as if the way things reliably seem is the way



things really are. For finding ripe fruit, avoiding leopards...knapping a tool, and so on, sensory experience that wore its mentalistic nature on its sleeve would be a pointless extravagance and distracting hindrance. Projectivism, on this view, far from being an extravagance, is the predictable result of natural selection's tight-fisted efficiency."

My account of moral experience, which makes no mention of moral properties, is therefore able to be easily subsumed as part of a purely evolutionary account of moral experience. When we experience an individual, for example, as categorically worthy of condemnation, we project a moral colour onto that individual – natural selection would not have encumbered us with the unnecessary cost of making moral experiences of a different type to other apparent experiences of external properties.

**5.9** Moral agreement and moral disagreement can also be accounted for by the purely evolutionary explanation. In terms of moral agreement, if moral thinking evolved in order to promote social cooperation, then the fact that there has been historically much agreement in concrete moral judgments is to be expected. As Street (2006:115) has pointed out, the judgments that we tend to morally agree on across cultures and times are often judgments that promote social cooperation and would be judgments favoured by Darwinian selection pressures:

“(1) The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason in favor of it.

(2) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.

(3) We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.

(4) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return.

(5) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.

(6) The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment.”

The non-moral reasons described above have gained widespread acclaim, across times and cultures, when rephrased in moral language. Indeed, Railton (1986:198) suggested that moral agreement has emerged where:

“...the advantages of certain forms of constraint or cooperation are highly salient even in the dynamics of small groups”

Specifically, this has led to moral agreements regarding:

“...prohibitions of aggression and theft, and of the violation of promises.”

If moral thinking evolved in order to promote social cooperation, then moral agreement regarding the claim that breaking a promise is a moral wrong, and regarding the claim that accidentally tripping over is not a moral wrong makes clear sense – concrete moral judgments are often in agreement because they were shaped to promote the same socially advantageous, fitness-enhancing ends.

**5.9.1** Moral disagreement, on the other hand, is also easily explainable given the purely evolutionary explanation. Since circumstances often change and individual characters differ, with no moral truth to call upon, our moral judgments will come to clash in practical situations because they are shaped not by apprehension of moral properties, but by transient psychological and cultural factors. Again, turning to Railton (1986:198):

“...moral questions that concern matters... where the gains or losses from particular forms of social cooperation or constraint are difficult to perceive...are less likely to achieve early or stable approximation to social rationality.”

Examples of areas of moral disagreement are (1986:198-9):

“...matters of social hierarchy – for example, the permissibility of slavery, of authoritarian government, of caste or gender inequalities – and social responsibility – for example, what is the nature of our individual or collective obligation to promote the well-being of others?”

Where it is not apparent exactly how best to promote social cooperation, our moral judgments veer off in many different directions and there is no moral truth to guide them back together. Thus, moral disagreement emerged alongside moral agreement, where both are a by-product of the emergence of evolutionary advantageous private moral thinking and public moral discourse.

**5.10** Before moving on, it is worth responding to one further criticism of the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data. If, as has been described, moral thinking emerged as an evolutionary advantageous response to the need for greater social cooperation, why did moral thinking only emerge in human beings? After all, to take just one example, wolves require some level of social cooperation (as do lions and other pack hunting animals) so why did moral thinking not evolve for these animals also? If nothing can be done to separate human beings as a special case for the evolution of moral thinking, it might seem as if the explanation offered has a large gap.

**5.10.1** However, we can separate human beings as a special case. Human beings evolved the ability to think morally because we were uniquely placed to do so. By the time that greater social cooperation was required, human beings were already more cognitively advanced than other animals – our ‘big brain’ had already emerged.<sup>14</sup> This gave human beings the cognitive capacity to think in moral terms, something that our animal friends lacked. To take an analogy, it is an evolutionary advantage that we developed the ability to barter with each other in order to share resources. Yet, it is no threat to the evolutionary explanation of this capacity from the fact that lions have not also learned to barter with each other. This is because our greater cognitive capacity has allowed humans to evolve more complex systems for social cooperation, of which moral thinking is an example.

**5.10.2** In addition, this development of morality in humans especially, rather than in other animals, may well be no coincidence. This is because *as a result of our big brain* and the associated cognitive flexibility that such a big brain

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<sup>14</sup> For more discussion of the evolution of our brains, see Bailey and Geary (2009).

affords, a system for policing and controlling our behaviour is required. Without such a system, for example, I may concoct a devious plan for revenge that might please me in the short-run, but will only cause a long-term damaging train of violence in the long-run; other animals lack the cognitive capabilities to consider such future behavioural possibilities in detail. According to Joyce (2006:115), morality is just such a helpful policing and behaviour directing system:

“And perhaps natural selection has made us want to cooperate, and granting us a tendency to think of cooperation in moral terms (where this includes the capacity for guilt) is a means of securing this desire.”

Thus, not only are humans cognitively capable of thinking morally, we are also seemingly in need of the types of directives and prescriptions that morality seems well placed to offer – the evolution of morality could have been non-coincidental given our big brains.

**5.11** I cannot have hoped to do more than sketch the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data set. However, I take it that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data set is *as explanatorily powerful as* the moral property explanation. By reference to both Mameli (2013) and Joyce (2006) primarily, I demonstrated the purely evolutionary explanation of why and how private moral thinking, public moral discourse, moral experience, moral agreement and moral disagreement could have evolved, without any need to invoke moral properties. If there are gaps in this account, then such gaps are no more severe than the standing concern regarding our epistemic access to moral properties, looked over in section four. I have not shown that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is the best explanation as yet, but I have demonstrated that in terms of explanatory power, the purely evolutionary explanation is at least on all fours with its moral property rival.

## **6. Descriptive, not Prescriptive, Evolutionary Explanation**

**6.1** Prior to assessing which of the moral property and purely evolutionary explanations of the moral data set is superior, it is important to note that discussion of the social benefits of moral thinking etc. in section five was descriptive, rather than prescriptive.

**6.2** Given my ambitions in the remaining chapters of this thesis, it is crucial to make clear what does, and does not, follow from the above discussion. It may seem that moral thinking is something that we should positively encourage in order to promote advantageous social cooperation. The utility of moral thinking for individuals in our evolutionary past may seem to be indicative of its value for us today.

**6.3** However, the above is not a legitimate inference. An analogy should make clear why this is so.

**6.3.1** Assume, not too unfairly, that the upholding of a monarchy has been useful for different societies through history. The leadership of a wise ruler, able to rise above immediate disputes and decisively make decisions for the long-term good may, in the past, have been the difference between a society's success and its annihilation or suppression under a foreign yolk. Although examples of Kings or Queens from history could be sought to buttress this point, to avoid divergent and tangential historical disputes, I keep the discussion purposefully abstract.

**6.3.2** Yet, the fact that a monarchy may have been useful for a society in the past – and thereby earned a central place in the structure of a society as it evolved - does not imply that it remains useful today, in what may be quite different circumstances. In the modern world, social cohesion may be better served by a democratic head of state, rather than one placed in the role by birth right alone.

**6.4** The key lesson here is not that Britain should overthrow its monarchy, but that a particular system's historical success in promoting social cohesion is no

guarantee of future success. Moral thinking may be an evolutionary mismatch, defined by Euler (2010:22) as:

“...an adaptation advantageous in ancestral environments but useless in modern times, like the hedgehog’s instinct to roll itself inwards when a car approaches.”

Moral thinking may once have been the most appropriate method for natural selection to favour in order to aid our ancestors in promoting social cooperation, but this descriptive fact does not have any prescriptive edge – we should not garner a future ‘ought’ from a past ‘was’.

**6.5** When I, in upcoming chapters, argue that we should abolish moral thinking in order to promote personal and social goods that are important to us, it will not be sufficient to undermine my argument to refer to the purely evolutionary explanation of moral thinking. The purely evolutionary explanation of morality may suggest that there is something to be said for moral thinking, but it does not rule out the idea that we would, now and in our current context, be better off by abolishing such moral thinking. The descriptive fact may inform, but does not entail, the prescriptive fact.

## **7. Identifying the Best Explanation**

**7.1** I have suggested that the moral property and purely evolutionary explanations of the moral data cannot be separated in respect of their explanatory power; for all we can tell without further detailed investigation (keeping in mind the caveats in both sections four and five) both theories provide the basis for a sufficient explanation of the moral data. Moral experience, private moral thinking and public moral discourse, moral agreement and moral disagreement can be explained both by positing, and by denying, the existence of moral properties.

**7.2** In this section, I defend the claim that the purely evolutionary explanation is the best explanation of the moral data set and that, therefore, we should not accept the existence of moral properties. I proceed by outlining three

different criteria (in addition to explanatory power, which has already been considered) by which we can judge which explanation of the data is best:

1) Occam's Razor

1a) Qualitative Parsimony

1b) Quantitative Parsimony

2) Explanatory Coherence

3) Explanatory Simplicity

I shall not make any further reference to wider interests that may be served by each explanation, or any reference to the level of explanatory depth provided by each explanation. As I have made clear, I accept that both explanations sufficiently explain the data at least based on the discussions and assumptions in sections four and five (from here on I drop this epistemological caveat in respect to the sufficiency of the explanations of the moral data unless stated otherwise).

**7.3 Occam's Razor:** According to Lycan (1975:223), the following is a statement of Occam's Razor:

"Do not multiply posited entities beyond explanatory necessity"

As a methodological principle, Occam's Razor as stated above is an appeal to ontological parsimony; philosophers are directed to ensure that their explanations do not invoke any unnecessary entities.

**7.3.1** It is important to be clear whether it is numbers of entities or types of entities that we should be careful about positing in our explanations.

Vanderburgh (2014:318) makes clear the difference between a quantitative reading of Occam's call for parsimony and a qualitative reading of the call:

"(a) The degree of *qualitative parsimony* of a theory is determined by the number of *types* of entities that the theory postulates.

(b) The degree of *quantitative parsimony* of a theory is determined by the number of *individual entities* (of a given type) that the theory postulates”

A quick example makes the distinction clear. If a theory *a*, seeking to explain event *e*, posits 100 unicorns, and a theory *b*, seeking to explain the same event posits 8 dragons and 5 elves, then theory *a* is qualitatively more parsimonious, while theory *b* is quantitatively more parsimonious.

**7.3.2** Walsh (1979:241) is correct when she says that:

“Occam’s razor is a prescriptive principle and can be stated as an imperative. Accordingly, we can ask: why should this imperative be obeyed?”

However, according to Tallant (2013:689):

“That we ought to endorse [qualitative parsimony as a methodological principle] is *relatively uncontested*”

For her own sake, Walsh (1979:41) was impressed by Occam’s Razor because it encouraged “intellectual elegance”. However, while the qualitative version of Occam’s Razor has found common favour, the quantitative version has been less successful in gaining widespread appeal. So, Lewis (1973:78) says:

“I subscribe to the general view that qualitative parsimony is good in a philosophical or empirical hypothesis; but I recognize no presumption whatever in favour of quantitative parsimony”

On the other hand, Vanderburgh (2014:318) is at least:

“...sympathetic to the idea that quantitative parsimony is a theoretical virtue”

**7.3.3** I do not wish to be side-tracked into a debate regarding the merits of quantitative and qualitative parsimony as methodological principles for deciding between competing explanations. This is not to suggest that such debates are not worthwhile, but that they are not for this chapter. Rather, I assume that both principles are worthwhile to at least some degree. In any case, given that I argue that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is more parsimonious on *both readings*, it does not matter much which



principle of parsimony is of primary importance (even if, off the record, I concur with the Lewisian view).

**7.4** In respect of qualitative parsimony, it is apparent which explanation is more parsimonious. The moral property explanation requires, quite obviously, an acceptance of moral properties. The purely evolutionary explanation, on the other hand, requires neither moral properties nor any other types of entities that are not already readily countenanced (such as human beings, big game etc.). If, as I have argued, the moral property explanation is no more powerful for positing moral properties, then there is no explanatory necessity to accept the existence of moral properties and it would be a violation of the qualitative reading of Occam's razor to posit them.

**7.4.1** It is also worth noting that an appeal to the qualitative version of Occam's Razor makes clear why the explanations of the moral data offered in 3.2 and 3.3, involving brain switches and undetectable gases, are so unappealing. These explanations would require us to posit new *types* of existents – either aliens and brain switches, or gases that are undetectable to our best instruments and that have the ability to directly influence our psychologies in startling consistent ways. If we find the appeal to qualitative parsimony useful in justifying a rejection of explanations of moral data that involve orbiting aliens or brain-chemistry altering gases that are impervious to study, then it suggests that we should also find the appeal to qualitative parsimony useful for deciding between the moral property and the purely evolutionary explanations of the moral data.

**7.5** In regards to quantitative parsimony, the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data once again outperforms the moral property explanation. While different moral properties would be required to make true a host of non-negative moral propositions, no such extra properties are required according to the purely evolutionary explanation. Indeed, even if the moral property explanation posited just one moral property, it would be quantitatively less parsimonious than the purely evolutionary explanation, for

the defender of the moral property explanation posits moral properties *in addition to*, not *instead of*, the evolutionary pressures that favoured socially cooperative moral behaviour (this issue is discussed further in 7.8.2).

**7.6 Explanatory Coherence:** Appeals to qualitative or quantitative parsimony are not the only grounds on which a choice of 'best explanation' may be based. As well as concerning ourselves with the size of our ontology, we might also be tempted to favour the explanation that better coheres with our background beliefs. According to Mackonis (2013:980):

"Coherence...stands for the coherence between explanatory hypothesis and relevant background knowledge. A hypothesis is better the more coherent it is."

**7.6.1** Initially, it might seem as though the moral property explanation better coheres with relevant background beliefs. This is because the presence of moral properties in the world would make true some of the non-negative moral propositions that most people readily accept. Conversely, the purely evolutionary explanation would entail that these non-negative moral propositions are all false in virtue of denying the moral property truth makers for these beliefs.

**7.6.2** However, coherence cuts both ways in this debate. The purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data coheres with much contemporary thinking regarding the socially and psychologically grounded emergence of moral thinking, devoid of any reference to moral properties. Perhaps the defender of moral properties could accept some of this evolutionary story with respect to the social function of morality or the psychological mechanisms behind moral experience, but by invoking moral properties the defender of the moral property explanation departs from parts of the purely evolutionary account. Street (2006:155) has questioned just how much of the evolutionary explanation the moral property theorist could accept given that:

"The best causal accounts of our evaluative judgements, whether Darwinian or otherwise, make no reference to the realist's independent evaluative truths."

Even if moral properties did exist, the evolutionary explanation of moral judging remains overwhelmingly credible. If the defender of moral properties rejects the evolutionary story, in so doing, they posit an explanation of the moral data that fails to cohere with very strongly held background evolutionary beliefs. I shall not pursue Street's objection in great depth, but if there is a tension for the moral property theorist in accepting aspects of the purely evolutionary explanation, then there is at least some lack of coherence to firmly held, relevant evolutionary beliefs engendered by the moral property explanation.

**7.6.3** As to the value of coherence generally, however, Mackonis (2013:981) notes, that:

“Even if coherence with background knowledge is the most important explanatory virtue...this does not mean that explanatory hypothesis cannot contradict and eventually alter background knowledge.”

Not to allow that a putative explanation can both fail to cohere with certain background beliefs and yet still be the best explanation of some data set would be to take an unduly conservative stance towards the merits of altering our beliefs. Specifically, in this context, it is at least dubious how much weight we should grant to beliefs that at least some moral propositions are true, given that the point of the purely evolutionary explanation of moral properties is to challenge the commitment to moral properties that underlies this broad commitment to true (non-negative) moral propositions. Faith in moral truths may be widespread, but it is far from clear that such faith should count against the purely evolutionary explanation given that this explanation coheres with much (non-faith-based) thinking in the human-focussed sciences. This is especially true given that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data can explain both the presence of moral beliefs and the fact that we think that moral claims have truth-makers and sometimes accurately describe the distribution of moral properties in the world – it is thus far from *ad hoc* to be less than convinced that the best explanation of the moral data

will necessarily be the explanation that best coheres with ordinary moral beliefs.

**7.7 Explanatory Simplicity:** In addition to considering how parsimonious and how coherent with our background beliefs the two explanations of the moral data are, we can also test the explanations in terms of their simplicity. Of course, an explanation might be said to be simpler if it posited either fewer types of entities, or fewer total entities. However, this reading of simplicity would clearly take us back to the ground covered in 7.6 and 7.7. Instead, simplicity in this context relates to what Mackonis (2013:987) calls syntactic simplicity:

“Syntactic simplicity is structural simplicity. It consists in minimising the number of structural components of the language of a hypothesis, or the number of structural components of a hypothesis itself: symbols, vocabulary, adjustable parameters etc.”

**7.7.1** The moral property explanation might be thought to be simpler in the above sense, since in positing just one type of entity (a moral property) to explain the moral data, it relies on a small number of structural components. On the other hand, the purely evolutionary explanation is simple in so far as it utilises the pre-existing resources of evolutionary theory and does not add extra references to moral properties into the explanatory mix.

**7.7.2** However, I will not adjudicate on which explanation is simpler. This is because it is far from clear that it would be fair to judge the purely evolutionary explanation in terms of simplicity. According to Carruthers (2006:151), simplicity in biological explanations is implausible because:

“[biological systems are] messy and complicated, full of exaptations and smart kludges.”

It is therefore not clear why reducing the number or the length of premises in an explanation of the evolution of moral thinking, for example, should be seen as virtuous. In a complex world, with a complex evolutionary history, we might expect complexity in the explanation of the moral data. Rather than

pursue this point, I leave the issue of explanatory simplicity to one side since it does not seem relevant to deciding which explanation is the best explanation of the moral data.

**7.8** On balance, I suggest that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is the best explanation of the moral data. This is because, assuming the purely evolutionary and moral property explanations are equally explanatorily powerful, the purely evolutionary explanation is qualitatively and quantitatively more parsimonious than the moral property explanation, as well as adequately cohering with many of our background beliefs in the fields of evolutionary science, psychology and sociology. It must be admitted that the purely evolutionary account does not cohere with the belief that at least some non-negative moral propositions are true, where the moral property explanation does cohere with such a belief, but this fact must be weighed against the need not to be overly conservative in refusing to reconsider the truth-values of commonly held beliefs when those beliefs come under direct attack.

**7.8.1** On the basis of the above, I believe it is clear that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is the best explanation. For those not yet convinced, there is one more problem facing the moral property explanation that further counts against its status as the premier explanation.

## **8. Queerness**

**8.1** Thus far, I have not referred to the supposed queerness of moral properties. This may have been something of a surprise given the apparent centrality of queerness to Mackie's (1977) famed defence of MET. However, while it is important to recognise the queerness of moral properties, this recognition merely feeds into the wider evaluation of the moral property explanation of the moral data.

**8.1.1** In this section, I make clear why moral properties can be labelled as queer, as well as why this labelling makes concerns regarding the lack of qualitative parsimony associated with the moral property explanation all the more potent.

**8.2** Before moral properties can be challenged regarding their queerness, it is necessary to make clear how queerness complaints should be understood, as well as what their wider philosophical significance amounts to. After all, the mere fact that something is queer (such as a taste in music, or a preference for odd combinations of food) does not usually give rise to concerns regarding metaphysical status.

**8.3** Shepski (2008) has helped to make clear both how the queerness complaint should be understood and whether or not it is worth its philosophical salt. On the basis of Shepski's discussion, the charge of queerness can amount to either:

- 1) A charge of qualitative ontological profligacy
- 2) A charge of strangeness
- 3) A charge of objectionable difference

Below, I explain why equating queerness with objectionable difference is natural, philosophically appropriate and important in the context of deciding which explanation of the moral data is best. Prior to this, I make clear why we should not (purely) equate queerness with either charges of qualitative ontological profligacy or strangeness.

**8.4** *Queer = Qualitatively Ontologically Profligate*: If we regard the queerness complaint merely as a complaint that something is qualitatively ontologically profligate (the qualitative label is assumed from hereon), then we deprive the queerness complaint of any unique philosophical interest. Instead, we would return to the discussion of 7.5 and 7.6 – queerness itself would be no more than linguistic window dressing with no philosophically significant role to play.

**8.4.1** In addition, Shepski (2008:375) correctly notes that equating queerness with ontological profligacy is not even a natural thing to do. It is certainly correct that profligate entities may be queer, but such a connection is not necessary:

“To borrow an example from Quine and to put it to slightly different use, Pegasus would not be queer, if he existed, merely because he does not now figure in our explanations of anything. There is nothing objectionably queer about a horse with wings; it is merely that such creatures do not, in fact, exist.”

The charge of ontological profligacy may be levelled against unicorns, the Loch Ness Monster or mermaids, but it is not clear why such creatures would be queer just in virtue of this fact.

**8.5** *Queer = Strange*: It is more natural to read the queerness complaint as being intimately linked to the strangeness of a queer entity. However, reading the queerness complaint in this way deprives the complaint of its philosophical relevancy. The fact that something is strange does not say anything about whether or not it exists – for plenty of strange things do exist. Indeed, strangeness itself also seems to be a subjective concept. What is strange to me may not be strange to you, or to a biologist, or to a theoretical physicist.

**8.5.1** However, even if we attempt to ground strangeness, in respect of philosophical queerness, in more objective terms, we get no closer to saving the philosophical significance of this type of queerness objection. Consider the following three options.

**8.5.2** *Queer = Strange = Unexplainable*: If queer properties are strange, and strange properties are unexplainable, then we might seem to have a reason to doubt the existence of a property in virtue of its queerness. However, according to Shepski (2008:376):

“...we will never succeed in eliminating the unexplainable from our ontology. Suppose we have in hand the best and most complete possible explanation of things. This will consist of a chain of explanations or some set of such chains. To trot out a

familiar argument, each chain must terminate, go in a circle, or be infinitely long. In the first case, the explanations at the points of terminus will themselves be unexplained, and since ex hypothesi we have the most complete possible explanation of all things, these unexplained explanations will be unexplainable. In the remaining cases, the question, 'Why these chains of explanation?' arises. The chains of explanation will themselves be unexplained, and since ex hypothesi we have the most complete possible explanation of all things, this is again a case of something's being unexplainable. Thus the mere fact that something is unexplainable is no grounds for refusing to admit it into one's ontology."

**8.5.3** In addition, the unexplainability of a particular property does not even seem to make it queer, on a natural reading. For, if queerness is a matter of degree as it seems to be, then, per Shepski (2008:377), we should expect to find a theory that explains less than a rival as more queer. Given that we do not seem to find this, this reading of the queerness complaint remains unappealing.

**8.5.4** *Queer = Strange = Incomprehensible*: Incomprehensibility, as grounding for the queerness complaint, would also deny the complaint its philosophical significance. This is because comprehension is innately linked to cognitive capabilities, and as Shepski (2008:376) says:

"...it is hard to see why [a] limitation of human cognitive capacity should count against [a putative property]."

The fact that we could not make sense of a property suggests nothing about the state of universe and whether or not such a property exists.

**8.5.5** *Queer = Strange = Nonsensical*: In order to avoid any troubling connection to actual human abilities, let us define something as being nonsensical if and only if it is logically impossible. A square-circle, for example, would be a queer and nonsensical entity according to this picture of queerness. However, if this is all queerness amounts to, then as with the reduction of queerness to a claim of ontological profligacy, queerness carries no interesting philosophical weight. As Shepski (2008:376) states:



“We are already familiar with arguments that reject putative entities on the ground that the language that allegedly picks them out is meaningless. In contrast, the argument from queerness proceeds by asking us to conceive the entities in question and to reflect on just how queer they would be if they existed.”

**8.5.6** In addition, unless we are prepared to grant that moral properties are logically impossible, this version of the queerness complaint would not apply to moral properties. This is not a case I wish to pursue and, as Shepski suggests above, the charge of nonsensibility does not fit with the use of the queerness argument as Mackie (1977:38) deployed it:

“If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.”

If queerness were to be associated with logical impossibility, it is highly unclear why Mackie would concern himself with a universe in which queer entities actually existed.

**8.6** *Queer = Objectionably Different*: Given the failings of the previously considered versions of the queerness complaint, I take the best reading of the complaint as one grounded in the objectionable difference of queer properties. This reading fits neatly with the statement from Mackie above, focussing on the “utterly different” natures of queer entities.

**8.6.1** As it stands, this version of the queerness complaint may not seem very compelling. All entities are, to some degree, different to all other entities. However, if we accept that queerness itself can come in degrees, this issue can be sidestepped. What makes something queer to a note-worthy degree – genuinely queer - is when that thing is ‘unique in a unique way’ compared to all other existents. Consider an example.

**8.6.2** Ghosts would be genuinely queer, if they existed, because ghosts would bring together qualities that would make them unique in a unique way. Ghosts would be the only entities that both lack a physical constitution and are able to interact with the physical world. These qualities are not possessed

by any other type of existent. To borrow a Wittgensteinian phrase, while a family resemblance links humans and fish, or televisions and laptops, or carrots and oak trees, ghosts do not resemble anything else that we know to exist.

**8.6.3** The fact that ghosts would be genuinely queer does not, importantly, suggest that they would be nonsensical or logically impossible. Queer entities are possible entities, and indeed some queer entities do actually seem to exist. For example, from an amateur perspective, a black hole seems to be both genuinely queer (i.e. unique in a unique way) and yet exist.

**8.7** If genuinely queer properties can exist, it is fair to wonder what philosophical relevance a charge of genuine queerness actually has. However, what the queerness complaint does is justify a strong scepticism about genuinely queer entities. Metaphysical conservatism must stand aside when the evidence in favour of a genuinely queer entity is overwhelming, as it is with black holes, but queerness must frame the assessment of such evidence.

**8.7.1** In order to understand why this is the case, recall the case of Scrooge in 'A Christmas Carol'. Scrooge is justified in his scepticism regarding his visitation by the ghosts of Christmases past, present and future because such ghosts would be very queer things. If Scrooge had been woken by another human being, then the lack of queerness of this event would not have prompted the same level of scepticism. Indeed, in respect of assessment of ghost-evidence, ordinary practice bears out the role of queerness. Where eyewitness testimony, video evidence and apparent physical evidence are enough to convince most of us of the existence of non-queer entities (such as a rabbit in the garden), these evidence types are not enough to convince us of the existence of genuinely queer entities such as ghosts – as any viewer of Discovery Channel documentaries will attest.

**8.7.2** While all properties may be on the queerness spectrum, it is properties that are unique in a unique way that are genuinely queer to a philosophically relevant degree. Such genuinely queer properties must discharge a *higher*

*explanatory burden* than non-queer properties in order to earn a place in our ontology; we might say that there is an *a priori* explanatory burden for such genuinely queer properties to overcome.

**8.8** This reading of the queerness complaint not only preserves its philosophical significance, but it also makes it relevant to the decision regarding which explanation of the moral data is best. This is because, if they existed, moral properties would be genuinely queer properties, as they would be unique in a unique way – no other existent in the universe brings together the qualities of mind-independence and categorical prescriptivity. This would raise the explanatory burden for such properties. As has been shown, there is no explanatory necessity for countenancing moral properties. Given this fact, it is clear that moral properties do not overcome the higher explanatory burden due to them as a result of their queerness. In this respect, moral properties are more like ghosts than they are like black holes – they are queer and they are not necessary to the explanation of a data set.

**8.8.1** The above clearly counts against the idea that moral properties are a part of the best explanation of the moral data. Indeed, accepting genuinely queer properties without such explanatory necessitation would fail to cohere with the methodological belief that queer properties must overcome an explanatory *a priori* weight that is greater than the explanatory *a priori* weight facing non-queer properties.

**8.9** Having made clear what the queerness complaint amounts to, why it is philosophically significant and how it relates the issue of which is the best explanation of the moral data, I suggest that it is now even clearer than it was at the end of section seven that the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is the best explanation of that data. While the purely evolutionary explanation is more qualitatively and quantitatively parsimonious, adequately coheres with background beliefs and is not committed the existence of queer properties, the moral property explanation is less qualitatively and quantitatively parsimonious and is committed to the existence of queer

properties. The purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data is the best explanation of the moral data.

**8.9.1** The clear implication of this conclusion is that we should not accept the existence of moral properties because they are not explanatorily licensed. This conclusion completes the case for MET that was started in Chapter One and justifies the claim that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true.

**8.9.2** It is true that this MET conclusion is couched in epistemological, rather than entirely ontological, language. However, this provides little reason for optimism for defenders of moral properties, for while such properties may be metaphysically possible, they are properties that we should not believe in. Mere possibility is, by itself, cold comfort.

**8.9.3** However, Shafer-Landau has appeared to suggest that the fact that moral properties are not part of the best explanation of the moral data is not, in fact, a problem for such properties and should not entail our non-belief in them. He (2007:323) says:

“The job description of normative facts does not include the possession of explanatory power...an explanatory failure does not license their expulsion from our ontology.”

Shafer-Landau’s point seems to be that moral properties need not “explain non-normative phenomena” – such as the different aspects of the moral data. Moral properties need not explain moral experience or moral agreement, for example, they need only:

“...specify ideals, requirements, or standards that in some way must be met”

**8.9.4** However, it is clear that ideals, requirements and standards can be specified without normative facts/moral properties – it is just that those ideals, requirements and standards would be non-moral, such as the requirement to wear certain clothing in an office or an ideal regarding forms of communication within a large company structure. Given this, when it comes to choosing between belief or non-belief in moral properties it is hard

to understand what better mechanism there is than consideration of the explanatory value of moral properties. Belief in moral properties that does not rest upon a consideration of explanatory power looks to be more like a faith than a rational judgment – and if faith is the only mechanism for accepting the existence of moral properties, then there is little that I can say in this chapter to dissuade belief in such properties. For those who desire non-faith based reasons to accept the existence of moral properties, I offer my discussion in this chapter as sufficient to undermine belief in moral properties.

## **9. Conclusion**

**9.1** In this chapter, I have completed the defence of MET, started in Chapter One, by arguing that the best explanation of the moral data set is the purely evolutionary explanation that does not posit any genuine moral properties. The fact that we should not accept the existence of moral properties implies that we should not accept that any non-negative moral proposition is true.

**9.2** I began by making clear the moral data that required explanation – moral experience, private moral thinking and public moral discourse, moral agreement and moral disagreement. Having outlined how different explanations of this data may proceed, I focussed on the moral property and purely evolutionary explanations of the moral data.

**9.3** I accepted that both explanations were explanatorily powerful and could sufficiently explain the moral data coherently and fully on their own terms. However, I argued that the purely evolutionary explanation was the best explanation in virtue of it being qualitatively and quantitatively more parsimonious, adequately cohering with background beliefs and not being committed to the existence of queer properties. Given that queer moral properties are not explanatorily necessitated, we should not accept them into our ontology.

**9.4** On this basis, I conclude that MET is vindicated – we should not accept the truth of any non-negative moral claim because we should not grant the existence of any truth-making moral properties. This is not because I have shown that moral properties are logically impossible and cannot exist, but because I have demonstrated that we lack an overall reason to countenance such properties. If my arguments are sound, then to accept the existence of moral properties in the face of the purely evolutionary explanation would be to accept the existence of moral properties on the basis of a faith – and that is not a satisfactory way to defend assertions of moral truth.

**9.4.1** Perhaps, as I come to discuss in future chapters, even in the light of MET we should continue to act as if moral properties exist. However, we cannot, as a matter of clear-headed philosophical analysis – aside from our own personal desires and interests – conclude that such moral properties do exist; they do not fill a big enough explanatory gap given the purely evolutionary explanation of the moral data.

**9.5** From the next chapter onwards, I assess how we should live given the correctness of MET. In Chapter Four specifically, I outline precisely what options we have in the context (*our* context) where MET is accurate.

## **Chapter Four: The Route to Abolishing Morality**

### **1. Introduction**

**1.1** On the basis of the previous three chapters I have established that we should not accept the truth of any non-negative moral proposition. In this chapter I make clear the purpose and argumentative structure for the next four chapters of this thesis.

**1.2** I begin by outlining two key questions that emerge post-vindication of MET. Following this, I make clear the difference between Moral Abolitionism (hereafter MA) and Moral Preservationism (hereafter MP) as broad responses to MET.

**1.3** Post-MET options demarcated, I make clear the broad conclusion that I seek to defend across Chapters Five to Eight of this thesis. I outline how, in those chapters, I will argue that *most* (not all) people have *defeasible* (not necessary), *instrumental* (not categorical) reasons to favour the abolition of moral practice post-vindication of MET. Specifically, in this chapter, I highlight and respond to several possible methodological problems that may afflict the defence of this target conclusion in a post-MET context.

### **2. Key Questions Post-MET**

**2.1** The claim that ‘no non-negative moral proposition is ever true’ is descriptive, not prescriptive. It simply says that no non-negative moral truth is available as a justification for any particular action – recognition of this *lack of moral truth* does not, by itself, direct any positive change in behaviour. Suggestion that any particular behaviours or courses of action will be more attractive or desirable post-vindication of MET than they were pre-vindication of MET requires independent argumentative support beyond the mere citation of the vindication of MET.

**2.2** Two key questions do call out to be answered post-vindication of MET:

1. Should we continue talking and thinking morally, as well as being moved by moral judgments, given the vindication of MET?

2. If the answer to (1) is 'no', then what should we do instead?

**2.3** These are the two questions that guide the remainder of this thesis. In responding to question (1) *Moral Preservationists* and *Moral Abolitionists* split according to whether or not a continuation of engagement with morality is viewed as broadly desirable or not. These views will be described in more depth across Chapters Five to Eight, but I offer a broad outline below.

**2.4** MP is, broadly, the view that we should continue to actively participate in moral talking, moral thinking and moral judging even given the success of MET. Moral Preservationists accept that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true, but suggest that we continue to be active moral thinkers, moral talkers and morally-inspired actors etc. because, as Nolan, Restall and West (2005:308) put it:

“...realist moral talk...is useful.”

**2.4.1** MP comes in various forms, with different terminology for differing MP options depending on the writer that one considers – for clarity I follow the terminology favoured by Olson (2011) in discussing three specific MP options.

**2.4.2** *Revisionary Force Moral Fictionalism* is the view that we should *pretend* to moralise, in order to preserve the pragmatic benefits of morality without committing ourselves to error.<sup>15</sup> On this view, we should engage in a type of moral ‘make-believing’ in order to preserve the benefits of realist moral talk. Thus, on this account, if I asserted that ‘killing is a moral wrong’ then I would be making a pretend assertion in the same way that I pretend to assert that ‘the Easter Bunny is in the garden’ to a child on Easter morning.

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<sup>15</sup> This is the view defended by Joyce (2001).



**2.4.3** *Revisionary Content Moral Fictionalism* is the view that we should continue to genuinely moralise in order to preserve the pragmatic benefits of morality, but fictionally qualify those genuine moral assertions in order to avoid genuine error.<sup>16</sup> On this view, we do not ‘make-believe’ when asserting morally but make genuine moral assertions that are true only against a fictional backdrop. Thus, on this account, if I asserted that ‘killing is a moral wrong’ then I would be making a genuine assertion in the same way that I genuinely assert that ‘Kirk was Captain of the Enterprise’ but recognise that such a claim is true only against the fictional backdrop of the ‘Star Trek’ universe.

**2.4.4** In addition to these Moral Fictionalist responses to MET, Olson (2011) has also advocated *Moral Conservatism*, the view according to which we should continue to genuinely moralise, without any fictionalist qualification or pretence in assertion or judgment, in order to preserve the pragmatic benefits of morality. Thus, on this account, if I asserted that ‘killing is a moral wrong’ then I would be making a genuine assertion of the same form as a genuine moral assertion made prior to recognition that MET has been vindicated – I would believe my moral claim to be true, in an unqualified sense. Unlike Fictionalist versions of MP the supporter of Moral Conservatism is not afraid of genuine and unqualified error in moral belief post-vindication of MET.

**2.5** It is not for me, here, to make a judgment as to which of these three MP strategies is superior. I accept that at least one of these strategies for preserving morality is successful enough to allow the pragmatic benefits of morality to persist even after the vindication of MET. In the chapters that follow, however, I suggest that these supposed benefits are not as important as Moral Preservationists imagine.

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<sup>16</sup> Olson (2011:186) suggests that this is the Fictionalist strategy that Nolan, Restall and West (2005) would favour, despite their taking of “no official stand on which of these broad versions of moral fictionalism is more plausible”.

**2.6** MA is, broadly, the view that we should cease to engage with morality post vindication of MET. Moral Abolitionists, such as Hinckfuss (1987) and Garner (2007), accept that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true and advocate the elimination of moral talk, moral thinking and the making of moral judgments in the light of this fact. MA supporters believe that the costs of continuing to engage with morality outweigh the benefits.

**2.6.1** It is incumbent upon defenders of MA to answer question two from 2.2. Over the course of Chapters Five to Eight, it should become clear what an MA supporter might favour in respect of a replacement for morality in our lives, as well as why the abolition of morality is itself desirable. I do not provide any substantive argument for MA in the remainder of this chapter. Instead, I outline and defend the broad dialectic, exemplified in the next four chapters, that justifies an MA friendly conclusion.

### **3. Acceptable Normativity**

**3.1** There is an obvious worry facing anyone who suggests that people *should* live in a certain way post vindication of MET. If moral reasons are worthy of rejection in virtue of being mind-independent and categorically prescriptive, then it would not be possible to coherently claim that people have *mind-independent* and *categorically prescriptive* reasons to do anything at all in the light of the truth of MET.

**3.2** Streumer (2011, 2013) has defended an Error Theory that disallows both moral reasons specifically and all normative properties and reasons more broadly. However, MET as defended across Chapters One to Three (perhaps in this context alone) can be viewed as a moderate position. While Streumer attacks all normative reasons and the Moral Realist defends the existence of normative reasons, including moral reasons, the supporter of MET, as I have stated it, disallows moral reasons while saying nothing about non-moral normativity.

**3.2.1** As long as my ultimate claim that people should abolish morality post MET is not predicated upon a mind-independent, categorically prescriptive reason, then that normative assertion should not be unacceptable even given MET. In section five, I show specifically how the normative reason in favour of MA can and should be understood in terms of acceptable, non-mind-independent and non-categorically prescriptive, instrumental reasons.

#### **4. The Broad Dialectic**

**4.1** The target conclusion, to be established over Chapters Five to Eight, is that most people have defeasible, instrumental reasons to favour MA over MP. The argument towards that conclusion is run on the following lines – if you care about *x, y, z*, then you should favour MA instead of MP. The table below represents the specific argument used to support MA over the next four chapters:

Personal and Social Goods as Evaluative Concerns	Best Promoted By	Not Best Promoted By
Safety	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Prosocial Behaviour	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Productive Conflict Resolution	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Instrumentally Valuable True Beliefs	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism

**4.2** Roughly speaking, for those people who care about the personal and social goods highlighted, they will have an instrumental reason to favour MA over MP. There is much in the above table that requires unpacking. Firstly, I

have not made clear precisely what ‘safety’, ‘prosocial behaviour’, ‘productive conflict resolution’ and ‘instrumentally valuable true beliefs’ *qua personal and social goods* amount to. For now, it is reasonable to take an intuitive reading of these goods – they will be discussed in more depth in the chapters to come.

**4.2.1** Secondly, it is not clear what it would be for either MA or MP to *promote* the personal and social goods in question. However, by ‘promote’ I simply mean ‘lead to greater levels of safety’, ‘increased levels of prosocial behaviour’, ‘increased instances of productive conflict resolution’ and ‘a greater number of instrumentally valuable true beliefs across different individuals’. Certainly, these statements need greater precision also, but again that precision will come in the individual chapters themselves.

**4.2.2** Thirdly, it is far from obvious why MA would be better than MP in respect of promoting the personal and social goods identified, for intuitively morality might be thought of as being more conducive to, for example, the promotion of prosocial behaviour than any competing behaviour regulation system. However, this is also a subject of discussion for the upcoming chapters themselves. I will not pre-empt any of these discussions here.

**4.3** In the remainder of this chapter, I outline why, if the table in 4.1 can be shown to be correct, *most* people would have *defeasible, instrumental* reasons to favour MA over MP. Specifically, I defend the inclusion of each of the italicised terms in my conclusion. Below, I begin by making clear why most people would have defeasible, *instrumental* reasons to favour MP if the table in 4.1 is vindicated, and why instrumental reasons are acceptably normative even given the truth of MET.<sup>17</sup>

## **5. Normatively Acceptable Instrumental Reasons**

**5.1** According to Way (2013:1):

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<sup>17</sup> From this point the discussion assumes the correctness of the table in 4.1.

“We are instrumentally rational when we take necessary and effective means to our ends, and instrumentally irrational when we fail to do so.”

Instrumental rationality, and thereby instrumental reasons, is intimately connected to our ends. For example, if I decided to make one of my ends a loss of weight, then I would have an instrumental reason to cease eating excess amounts of cake – and I would be instrumentally irrational if I acted in opposition of this instrumental reason.

**5.1.1** Instrumental reasons are thus similar in nature to the hypothetical reasons that were discussed in 8.3 in Chapter One. Given that those hypothetical reasons stood opposite categorical reasons, it might seem to be clear why I couch my conclusion in favour of MA in terms of instrumental reasons. If people have, as valued ends, the personal and social goods identified in the table in 4.1, then they would seem to have instrumental reasons to favour MA as the practice that best promotes those ends. This would be a normatively acceptable claim even given MET because such instrumental reasons do not claim any normatively unacceptable categoricity.

**5.2** However, lurking behind this apparently simple understanding of instrumental rationality and instrumental reasons are several issues that require comment. Firstly, it is clear that our lives are often not as simple as in the example provided in 5.1. One of my ends may be a loss of weight, but another of my ends may be to enjoy the experience of fine food. In many cases these two ends will not coexist comfortably, and I will have apparent instrumental reasons to both stay away from the patisserie and to try a new cake that is on sale in the patisserie. In this circumstance, it is not clear what I would have instrumental reason to do, and how I could avoid being instrumentally irrational by acting in a way that undermines my securing one of my ends.

**5.2.1** Wedgwood offers an account of instrumental reasoning that suggests a way through these real world problems. According to Wedgwood (2011:307), what characterises instrumental reasoning is:

*“Integrating the various different intentions that one forms...into a rational overall plan.”*

In the case of choosing whether or not to enter the patisserie, it would be incumbent upon me, according to Wedgwood (2011:307), to:

*“...form a plan that has certain rational expectations of availability and value.”*

Given that both entering and not entering the patisserie are options that are available to me, I would be (instrumentally rationally) compelled to act in a way that allowed me to secure the end that I took to be *most valuable*. If I cared more for decreasing my weight than eating cake, I would have an instrumental reason to avoid the cake shop, but if the more valuable end for me was enjoying fine good, then I would have an instrumental reason to enjoy the fresh cream apple turnover.

**5.2.2** However, the above raises the issue of how to instrumentally rationally come upon the *value* of our different ends. In order to decide which of my ends is more valuable, I need to be able to legitimately compare those ends in terms of their value. While I above referred to ‘caring’ about decreasing my weight, for example, this still seems imprecise as it stands as a way of measuring value.

**5.2.3** The Humean Theory of reasons can help us to understand the values of our different ends. According to Schroeder (2007:144), the Humean Theory of reasons states that:

*“...all reasons are...explained by some feature of an agent’s psychology, which we are stipulatively calling a *desire*.”*

On this account, we may say that when I weigh my ends, the determiner of the value of an end is the *strength* of my desire to secure that end. I thereby have an instrumental reason to take effective means to the end that I desire most strongly. This conception of weighing ends in order to decide what we have instrumental reason to do fits with Hampton’s (1998:126) description of:

*“...[instrumental] imperatives [as seeming] to be reducible to beliefs and desires.”*

If I desire eating fine food more than I desire losing weight, and I believe that an apple turnover is ready for purchase in the patisserie, then I have an instrumental reason to enter the patisserie and buy the cake.

**5.3** Helpfully, the issue of choosing between competing ends does not occur in the context of this thesis, if, as stipulated, MA better promotes all four of the personal and social goods identified and the promotion of these personal and social goods is something that people strongly and widely desire – I consider this latter issue further in section six. Anyone who does strongly value the promotion of the identified personal and social goods does therefore seem to have an acceptably normative instrumental reason to favour MA over MP.<sup>18</sup>

**5.3.1** However, even this may yet be too quick. Hampton raised concerns that, if correct, would mean that instrumental reasons would not be as acceptably normative as suggested thus far. This is because, according to Hampton (1998:168):

“...criticism of a person as [instrumentally] irrational involves objecting not merely to *how* the person pursues what she wants, but also to *what* she wants.”

Hampton, not implausibly, suggests that it is a requirement for a person to be instrumentally rational not only that they take effective means to their ends (given the issues around weighing ends already mentioned), but also that their ends *cohere* (1998:168-177), that they do not *overly value* those ends that can be satisfied in the near future (1998:177-181) and that they do not *unduly ignore* either current preferences for likely future preferences, or likely future preferences for current preferences (1998:181-188).

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<sup>18</sup> A person may of course ‘disown’ their immediate desires, such as a person who desires to eat cake while shopping but more generally desires to be the type of person who can resist unhealthy food when it is presented to them. In this instance, the desire to eat cake may not seem to produce an instrumental reason for action for this individual. However, I do not need to further pursue this issue as it does not arise for (most) people (most of the time) in respect of their desires to promote safety, prosocial behaviour, productive conflict resolution or instrumentally valuable true belief; these desires are not often ‘disowned’ and so do produce weighty instrumental reasons.

**5.3.1.1** Examples make these apparent requirements for instrumental rationality clearer. Someone may seem to be instrumentally irrational if they strongly desire both to take an expensive holiday and to save money. In addition, a person may be instrumentally irrational if they have a stronger desire to watch television than pass a future exam, purely because the exam is temporally distant and the television offers a more limited, but more immediate, comfort. A person may also be instrumentally irrational if they desire to drink themselves into a stupor when sitting in a bar, even though they know that outside of this immediate context they have a much stronger standing desire to avoid alcohol.

**5.3.2** The fundamental issue raised by the above sentiments is that instrumental reasons may not be entirely reducible to beliefs and desires in the way suggested and in a way that separates them from unacceptably normative moral reasons, given MET. Hampton (1998:181) says:

“Local maximizers strike us as lamentably stupid insofar as they will not choose courses of action...whose short-term costs exceed their long-term benefits. Local maximizers aren’t, in a word, willing to *invest*, and wise investment seems to be one of the hallmarks of the instrumentally rational person.”

If we accept that there is something more to instrumental rationality than merely a person’s beliefs and desires, and we accept that the object of those beliefs and desires also matters, then there seems to be a *categorical* limit on the emergence of different instrumental reasons.<sup>19</sup> Again, Hampton (1998:165-6) sums up the issue by stating that:

“...the force of hypothetical [instrumental] imperatives is dependent on, and *is at least in part constituted by*, the force of some antecedent categorical imperative that is in part definitive of instrumental rationality.”

In essence, instrumental reasons are dependent upon categorically acceptable desires and ends. The individual who strongly desires to quit their PhD just

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<sup>19</sup> Clearly, this categoricity is only a problem for my account if it is a ‘non-institutional categoricity’ of the type referred to in Chapter One. Therefore, I assume that such non-institutional categoricity is being discussed from this point.



days before their defence in favour of becoming a permanent fixture in a dead-end bar somewhere does not have an instrumental reason to act in this way because longer term, but presently subdued, desires are being unduly ignored in a categorically irrational way.

**5.4** I accept that I cannot suggest that most people have a defeasible, *instrumental* reason to favour MA over MP, post-MET, if instrumental reasons are underpinned by categorical limitations of the type suggested in 5.3.1 and 5.3.2. For instrumental reasons to be normatively acceptable in the setting of this thesis they must be wholly reducible to non-queer and parsimonious beliefs and desires.

**5.5** With this in mind, there are at least two ways in which I can respond to Hampton's concerns. Firstly, perhaps buoyed by the success of the radically anti-intuitive MET, I could grant that individuals are always instrumentally rational just if they take effective means to the ends that they most strongly desire. Thus, people would be instrumentally rational even if they took effective means to secure ends that failed to cohere with each other, or even if they took effective means to secure ends whose value was skewed by temporal location.

**5.5.1** The above is certainly anti-intuitive and would mean that we could not suggest that people are instrumentally irrational even when they seem to be acting in self-destructive ways. However, although we could not criticise such people on grounds of instrumental irrationality, we could criticise them, or perhaps more pertinently, rebuke them, in other ways. For example, we could seek to remind the struggling alcoholic of the potency of his standing desire to get sober, or outline the importance of qualifications to the unmotivated gamer who is putting off revision. Allowing that a person is instrumentally rational in the sense defined does not imply that we could not seek to engage them in a productive debate over the values of their different ends.

**5.5.2** Yet, the fact that we would seek to *reason* with the individuals described above in order to get them to change their behaviour might suggest that they

are, in fact, acting in an instrumentally irrational way. However, I claim that it is not incoherent to suggest that in any specific circumstance a person may be both instrumentally rational and be acting in a way that they are likely to regret in the future. Indeed, the cost of denying this possibility, and claiming a categorical foundation for instrumental rationality, may be to open instrumental reasons up to the same line of attack that felled moral reasons; such instrumental reasons may become normatively unacceptable given MET. Accepting some apparently anti-intuitive implications regarding apparent instances of instrumental irrationality is likely preferable to that outcome.<sup>20</sup>

**5.5.3** In so far as this debate relates to my thesis, if the picture of instrumental reasons painted above is correct, then it would mean that anyone who strongly desired to promote the personal and social goods identified in 4.1 would have an acceptably normative instrumental reason to favour MA over MP, due to the fact that MA better promotes those personal and social goods. Crucially, no-one would be rationally compelled to value those goods as ends, but anyone who did value these ends *as a matter of contingent fact* should, instrumentally speaking, favour MA. Those who did not value such goods as ends would not, however, be instrumentally irrational in virtue of this fact.

**5.6** In addition, Hampton's concern would be undercut if her conception of instrumental rationality was accepted but it was denied that anyone had a categorical reason to be instrumentally rational. On this view, anyone who did desire to be instrumentally rational would have a reason to avoid the pitfalls of instrumental irrationality highlighted by Hampton, but that reason would itself be instrumental rather than categorical. Those people who did not value instrumental rationality – who perhaps just desired to take effective means to their desires *whatever their desires be at any one time* – would not violate a categorical requirement to be instrumentally rational by, for example, taking

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<sup>20</sup> It will not have escaped attention here that I attempt to preserve instrumental normativity in a way that I suggested was not open to the defender of moral normativity – by massaging the concept of an instrumental reason so as to make it ontologically acceptable. This is because I do not take Hampton to have identified 'conceptually non-negotiable' aspects of instrumental rationality.

effective means to purchasing tickets for two Broadway shows that start at the same time.

**5.6.1** Given this view, people would continue to have instrumental reasons to favour the practice that better promotes the ends that they care about. If I have correctly identified the most important of those ends in the table in 4.1, then people would still have an instrumental reason to favour MA over MP. However, there would be no categorical reason for someone to respect their instrumental reasons, or to avoid instrumental irrationality; no categorically grounded normatively directing reason would be violated by a person favouring MP over MA even in the circumstance as described. This individual would certainly be instrumentally irrational, but we could not say that they were making a categorical error in demonstrating this irrationality.

**5.7** I do not take a stance here on which of these responses to Hampton is correct. What matters, however, is that there are at least two plausible ways of denying that instrumental rationality has a troubling (given MET) categorical constraint upon it. Thus, when I claim that, post vindication of MET, most people have defeasible, *instrumental* reasons to favour MA over MP, this is an acceptably normative claim that cannot be undermined by the same arguments that were used to undermine the supposed existence of mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral reasons. Assuming either of the views sketched in 5.5 and 5.6, instrumental reasons are entirely reducible to beliefs and desires.

## **6. Most People Should Favour MA**

**6.1** Having defended the instrumental nature of the normative claim that people should favour MA rather than MP given the vindication of MET, I now outline why this normative claim is directed towards most, not all, people.

**6.2** The following example is a useful precursor to discussion of the choice that people face between MA and MP.

**6.2.1** Ipsos-MORI is a UK based polling firm that, amongst other things, produces a monthly report on the relative importance of certain issues in the minds of the UK electorate. This report is known as the 'Issues Index' and in October 2013 it revealed that the four most salient issues in the minds of the UK electorate were (in order of importance from highest to lowest) the economy, race relations/immigration, unemployment and the NHS.<sup>21</sup> If we were seeking to make clear which party people in the UK had an instrumental reason to vote for, then we would seemingly do well to make clear which party had the best policies in these four policy areas. Putting aside the issue of how such a project might be carried out and what it would be to have the best immigration policy etc., it is worth noting that *if* the Conservatives had the 'best' policies in these most salient policy areas, then it would appear that people would have an instrumental reason to vote Conservative at the next election.

**6.2.2** However, the above is too quick. On the basis only of the facts currently described, we could not validly conclude that all people in the UK would have an instrumental reason to vote Conservative. This is because not everyone would agree with the selection of the most important issues – aggregation of individual views does not suggest uniformity of individual views. Those individuals who take other policy areas to be more important will not have been given a good instrumental reason to vote Conservative, for they would not have been shown that the Conservatives have the best policies in the policy areas that they take to be most in need of focus.

**6.2.3** However, even suggesting that *most* people would have an instrumental reason to vote Conservative based on the discussion so far might also be thought to be an exaggeration. Consider some examples to see why. A teacher might care about all four of the highest ranking issues on the issues index, but care *most of all* about education policy. A farmer might care about all four of the highest ranking issues on the issues index, but care *most of all*

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<sup>21</sup> Data available from: [http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/Oct13Issues%20Index\\_topline.pdf](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/Oct13Issues%20Index_topline.pdf)

about agricultural policy. A soldier might care about all four of the highest ranking issues on the issues index, but care *most of all* about defence and foreign policy. Thus, although aggregating the views of such individuals might produce the outcome in the issues index referred to in 6.2.1, none of the people mentioned would have an instrumental reason to vote Conservative unless the Conservatives also had the best policies in their ‘pet areas’ (if we assume that individuals care more about these ‘pet areas’ than other areas combined). Given the possibility of people who care strongly about taking effective means to securing a desired end in their pet policy area, it might seem misleading to suggest that most people had instrumental reason to vote Conservative based only on the apparent success of Conservative policies in regards the top four issues of the ‘issues index’.

**6.3** The above discussion relates to the choice between MA and MP in the following way. Consider two individuals, Wendy and Ros.

<b>WENDY: Personal and Social Goods as Evaluative Concerns</b>	<b>Best Promoted By</b>	<b>Not Best Promoted By</b>
<b>Personal Safety</b>	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
<b>Prosocial Behaviour</b>	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
<b>Productive Conflict Resolution</b>	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
<b>Instrumentally Valuable True Beliefs</b>	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
<b>Scientific Rigour in Young People</b>	?	?

ROS: Personal and Social Goods as Evaluative Concerns	Best Promoted By	Not Best Promoted By
Personal Safety	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Prosocial Behaviour	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Productive Conflict Resolution	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Instrumentally Valuable True Beliefs	Moral Abolitionism	Moral Preservationism
Promotion of General Athletic Ability	?	?

**6.3.1** Wendy and Ros both care about the personal and social goods identified in 4.1, and desire that those personal and social goods are promoted.

However, in addition to this, Wendy cares about promoting general scientific rigour in young people. Yet, Wendy's desire that this good is promoted is no stronger than her desires regarding the promotion of the other four personal and social goods identified; Wendy cares equally about promoting her five most valued personal and social goods. Therefore, even if it was shown that MP better promoted general scientific rigour among young people, Wendy would still have an instrumental reason to favour MA. The promotion of scientific rigour is as important to Wendy as the promotion of the other goods, but it is not more important.

**6.3.2** On the other hand, the situation is different for Ros. For her, the promotion of general athletic ability is a 'pet issue' which matters to her more than the other four personal and social goods combined. In this regard, she is like the teacher who cares about the economy etc., but is concerned above all else with education policy. For all of MA's success in promoting the four personal and social goods identified in 4.1 better than MP, if it turned out that MP better promoted general athletic ability, Ros would have an instrumental reason to favour MP.

**6.3.3** It is worth briefly noting one relevant implication of my response to Hampton in section five. No matter what an individual's 'pet issue' actually is – even if they care more about, for example, promoting violence, or promoting skills with a 'yoyo' more than they care about promoting prosocial behaviour or productive conflict resolution - that person would have an instrumental reason to favour the practice that best promoted the end they most strongly desired. I cannot call upon categorical reasons for people to value certain ends – such as productive conflict resolution – over others.

**6.4** I concede, given the above and the possibility that MP will more successfully promote pet issues than MA (and, indeed, that MP will better promote tens of other personal and social goods not identified in this thesis compared to MA), that even by stating that most, not all, people have an instrumental reason to favour MA over MP I may be over-stretching the mark somewhat. However, if, as seems highly plausible, most people do *as a contingent matter of fact* greatly desire the promotion of the four key personal and social goods identified, then most people are very likely to have an instrumental reason to favour MA.

**6.4.1** There is clearly an 'empirical gap' that requires filling in at this point. Unlike Ipsos-MORI's empirically grounded 'issues index', I have merely stipulated four personal and social goods that I take most people to value very highly indeed. I accept that there will be outliers who do not care for these goods to be promoted, but I take these people to be, precisely, outliers to the norm.

**6.4.2** For now, the selection of key personal and social goods will stand as *prima facie* defensible, but not empirically grounded. I say more in the coming chapters in respect of each personal and social good as to why that good is something that most people would strongly desire to be promoted. Those discussions should go some way towards closing the empirical gap, but I accept the possibility that there will be other personal and social goods that certain groups of people may wish to see promoted that will not be addressed

in the course of this thesis – this is a practical limitation that cannot be overcome. However, despite not being able to cover every possible base, if I am correct that MA better promotes safety, prosocial behaviour, productive conflict resolution and instrumentally valuable true beliefs, I take it not to be unreasonable to conclude that most people would have an instrumental reason to favour MA over MP.

## **7. Defeasibility**

**7.1** Thus far, I have shown how I could reasonably conclude that post-vindication of MET, *most* people would have *instrumental* reasons to favour MA over MP. Prior to bringing this chapter to a close, it is worthwhile noting two further structural issues that highlight the *defeasibility* of this conclusion.

**7.2** Firstly, I accept that in making the case for MA in the way outlined I am a hostage to fortune in respect of changing features of the world. My claim that most people have an instrumental reason to favour MA rather than MP is actually better phrased as a claim that *most currently existing people, in the world as it currently stands* have an instrumental reason to favour MA rather than MP.

**7.2.1** This is because, firstly, if circumstances changed and people began to value different personal and social goods, then most people may lose their instrumental reason to favour MA - this is an implication from the discussion above. However, if circumstances were such that MP became better equipped to promote safety etc., then, again, people would lose their instrumental reason to favour MA.

**7.2.2** This latter possibility is not as academic as it might initially appear, even if the arguments for MA that follow in Chapters Five to Eight are sound. Given the different cultures and societies that exist around the world, it might seem plausible that MA could better promote safety at one time (or in one location), but MP better promote safety in another time (or location). If this



possibility extended across all four key personal and social goods identified, then I might be forced to accept that most people in 2013 had an instrumental reason to favour MA, while most people in 2040 may not have an instrumental reason to favour MP. This would be a messy outcome, but it is a possibility that must be considered ‘live’ pending the substantive chapters to come.

**7.3** In addition, it might turn out that a hybrid view could best promote the key personal and social goods identified. If MP better promoted safety and prosocial behaviour, but MA better promoted productive conflict resolution and instrumentally valuable true beliefs, then we might conclude that most people should engage with morality in some circumstances, but abolish their moral thinking in other circumstances. This might be a suggestion mitigated by psychological cost, but it is not an option that can be immediately dismissed.

**7.4** In the chapters that follow, as per the table in 4.1, I argue that MA currently best promotes all four personal and social goods and thus a hybrid view of the type mentioned above is unattractive. I also argue that MA better promotes the personal and social goods outlined for reasons that extend beyond a particular geographic or temporal locality – for reasons that have more to do with general, rather than proximate, human characteristics. However, the above does make clear why I take most people to have a *defeasible* instrumental reason to favour MA over MP, rather than some necessary or obviously persistent reason. The instrumental reason to favour MA is defeasible because circumstances can change, and it remains a possibility in the future that MP could better promote the key personal and social goods identified. This defeasibility is non-trivial – there is nothing necessary about the success of MA over MP that I will argue for in the coming four chapters and any success will be contingent upon the changing shape of our cultures and societies. MA is a position that will need argumentative renewal as our worldly circumstances change.

## **8. Conclusion**

**8.1** In this chapter I have offered no substantive arguments either for MA or against MP. I have made clear the dialectical route to the target conclusion to be established over the next four chapters, namely that *most* people have *defeasible, instrumental* reasons to favour MA over MP.

**8.2** I began by making clear two key questions that emerge post-vindication of MET, as well as briefly outlining Moral Preservationism and Moral Abolitionism.

**8.3** Following this, I outlined the broad dialectic for the Chapters Five to Eight. I made clear why the conclusion in favour of MA was stated in the terms referred to 8.1.

**8.4** Having made clear the structure of my defence of MA, in the next chapter I argue that the abolition of morality would better promote the key personal and social good of safety.

# **Chapter Five: Promoting Safety as a Personal and Social Good**

## **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In Chapter Four I outlined the argumentative route to the conclusion that most people have defeasible, instrumental reasons to favour Moral Abolitionism (MA) over Moral Preservationism (MP) post-vindication of MET. In this chapter, I begin the substantive defence of this conclusion by arguing that the abolition, rather than the preservation, of morality would better promote safety as a personal and social good.

**1.2** Building on section 2 of Chapter Four, I begin by making clear how MA and MP should be viewed in the context of MET. I also explain the description of *safety as a personal and social good* as well as justifying the focus upon 'harm', as a proxy for 'safety', in much of the main text.

**1.3** Following the above, I highlight the essentially comparative nature of this chapter in so far as I focus on the choice between MA and MP post-vindication of MET in the context of promoting safety.

**1.4** In the substantive sections of the chapter, I first consider three arguments designed to show that the preservation of morality would make us safer. Having shown that MP has no distinct advantage over MA in respect of promoting safety, I then present two further arguments that highlight crucial safety-relevant costs associated with MP - costs that would be reduced if morality was abolished.

**1.5** I conclude that the abolition of morality would better promote safety than the preservation of morality since safety-relevant costs associated with morality can be reduced whilst supposed safety-relevant benefits associated with morality can be maintained even if morality was abolished.

## **2. The Post-Vindication of MET Context**

**2.1** As per section 2.4 of Chapter Four, there are several ways in which a moral practice (defined as the collection of moral talking, moral thinking and morally-grounded motivations) might be preserved even after the truth of MET has been accepted. In this thesis, I make no suggestion as to which particular MP strategy is superior though I do focus on the impact of preserved moral *beliefs* in particular in this and coming chapters.

**2.2** The justification for not making a choice between either Fictionalist (of any stripe) or Conservationist MP strategies is based on the fact that I grant that however morality is preserved it can be preserved in such a way that its current power to direct behaviour is *fully maintained*. That is to say that the act of preserving morality does not undermine either the seriousness with which people take their moral beliefs or the scope of those moral beliefs. If moral beliefs are motivationally powerful beliefs in the context where MET has not been vindicated, I allow that they can be just as motivationally powerful in the context where MET has been vindicated.

**2.2.1** In neither this chapter, nor in future chapters, do I concern myself with the idea that some of the supposed advantages of morality are ‘lost in translation’ once individuals realise that MET is correct. However, I do, as this comment suggests, assume that individuals are aware that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true.<sup>22</sup> This assumption is not hugely relevant in practice given the allowance that post-vindication of MET, morality could function as powerfully as it does pre vindication of MET. However, I make this assumption for practical reasons, for as Garner (1993:102) foresaw:

“...in the twenty-first century it will be more difficult for the authoritarian and paternalistic leaders to administer “the medicine of deception” to people, who (with some regrettable exceptions) seem to be in the process of deciding that the medicine they really need is truth.”

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<sup>22</sup> This awareness may be either behind a fictionalist ‘precommitment’ (Joyce 2001:223-4) or in some compartmentalised corner of their mind (Olson 2011:199).

In order to avoid practical worries associated with ‘hushing up’ MET in an age of social media and increasing freedom of thought, and given the above-stated assumption that knowledge of MET would not in itself undermine the either influence or shape of a moral practice, I grant that individuals do, in some sense, understand that no non-negative moral proposition is ever true; nothing important hangs on this assumption and I state it for clarity of exposition only.

**2.3** The concession regarding the lack of impact that knowledge of MET would have upon morality in practice is, it should be noted, a particularly friendly concession. Even Joyce (2001:214) says:

“...it is not my intention to argue that making a fiction of morality would provide all of the benefits that a believed morality brings.”

Joyce is comparing the impact of a fictional morality with a believed morality, whereas I compare the effects of morality pre-vindication of MET and post-vindication of MET, so our comparisons might seem to be different. Yet, at least some MP strategies – such as those suggesting make-belief post-vindication of MET - would seem to be covered by Joyce’s comment.

However, this issue can be put to one side for I do not seek to argue that MA better promotes safety as a personal and social good (this terminology is defined in the next section) because of a flaw in MP strategies themselves.

Rather, I argue that the abolition of morality would better promote safety as a personal and social good *even if* it is assumed that moral thinking is as powerful, important and relevant post-vindication of MET as it is pre-vindication of MET.

### **3. Safety as a ‘Personal and Social Good’**

**3.1** I have thus far referred to safety *as a personal and social good*. This understanding of safety is important if the discussion that follows is to be properly focussed on a good that most people would highly value the

promotion of. I understand safety as a condition or property that a person can possess to different degrees in different contexts and as connected to the degree to which someone is free from injury or danger of injury – I thus focus on what Macpherson (2008:382) calls “safety qua recipient”.

**3.2** Safety is something that, I will argue, most people value as it pertains to both themselves and to those who they may have no personal relationship with – this is why I refer to safety as a *personal* and *social* good. If, for example, an individual learns how to use a razor correctly when shaving, or buys a stronger ladder in order to fix the roof of the garden shed, then this makes it less likely that this particular person will suffer injury and therefore their safety alone is enhanced. In my terms safety would be promoted *as a personal good*.

**3.3** On the other hand, if a law is passed that reduces the speed limit on country roads from 60mph to 40mph, then it becomes less likely that a great many people will suffer from injury over the long-term. In my terms, this means that safety would be promoted *as a social good*.

**3.4** In this chapter, I focus on safety as a personal and social good because, as per evidence to be offered in section five, most people highly value the promotion of both their own safety and the safety of groupings of people across national, political and economic borders. In answering the question of which practice, MA or MP, better promotes safety it is therefore important to consider the impact not only of those practices upon our own safety but also upon the safety of those individuals who we may not have any type of personal relationship with. From this point on, when I discuss ‘safety’ as a good to be promoted, the personal and social faces of this good are assumed unless stated otherwise.

## **4. Safety-Relevant Harms**

**4.1** Prior to analysing the relative success of MA and MP in terms of promoting safety it is important to make clear how levels of safety might actually be measured. The concepts of ‘safety’ and ‘harm’ are clearly not identical, for whereas a harm seems to be an *act* or *event*, safety is a *property* or *condition* as suggested in 3.1 However, in this chapter I do utilise the close relationship between these concepts. This is because, typically, when a person is safe they are not at risk of harm and when a person is at risk of harm they are not safe. As Macpherson (2008:378) says:

“...we also call things safe or unsafe in relation to the likelihood that they will *be* harmed.”

Importantly, I here focus on a person’s actual safety in any given context rather than their perceived safety – for these two things can certainly come apart.

**4.2** The merit for focussing on harms in this chapter, as a proxy for discussing safety directly, is that it is sometimes easier and more natural to talk about instances of harm reducing or increasing than it is to talk about levels of safety increasing or decreasing. By focussing on possible harm events discussions can be more specific and outcomes more quantifiable.

**4.2.1** Of course, it might be questioned why I would not merely focus on the impact of MA and MP upon instances of harm directly in this chapter, rather than as a proxy for discussing safety. The reason for utilising harms as a proxy is that more people are likely to desire the promotion of safety as a key personal and social good verses desiring a reduction in instances of harm. Clearly, as suggested, these two goods will often overlap (or my discussion of ‘harm’ in this chapter would be entirely tangential) but they do not always overlap. Not all harms are *safety-relevant* because not all harms affect our safety to a non-trivial degree when they occur. For example, if I was to cut my finger on a piece of paper, it is not clear that this instance of a harm would

affect my safety to any meaningful degree (extra circumstantial conditions aside). Even though it might be desirable to favour a practice that reduces such trivial non-safety relevant harms, it is likely that people would be far more concerned with the impact of MA and MP upon many other personal and social goods. In order to make sure that the good I evaluate MA and MP against in this chapter is a *key* personal and social good that most people *strongly* desire the promotion of, I thus only discuss the impact of MA and MP upon instances of safety-relevant harm in order to ascertain which practice better promotes safety as a key personal and social good.

**4.3** In order to make clear that the harms that I discuss herein are safety-relevant, consider the categories of harm as outlined below.

**4.4** *Physical Harm*: Instances of physical harms, unsurprisingly, damage us physically. The category of physical harm can be further broken down in two ways.

**4.4.1** *Macro Physical Harm*: Examples include a government sanctioning a war or a terrorist group planting a bomb. Macro physical harms are brought about by wider cultural and environmental factors; the 'macro' label applies to the cause or motive, rather than the impact, of the harm. There is, often, a multi-agency dimension to such harms as groups of individuals will generally be responsible for the occurrence of the harm. Although such harms can involve one person harming another directly, such as a suicide bomber detonating his bomb on a crowded train or a soldier shooting a man on the opposing side, these harms are not usually wholly caused or motivated by a distinctly personal malice between the harmer and the harmed.

**4.4.2** *Micro Physical Harm*: Micro physical harms are brought about by narrow, local and personal factors. Typically, there is a single-agency dimension to the instigation of the harm – as when an individual lashes out at his neighbour after a dispute over a parking space. These harms are usually wholly motivated by a personal malice between the harmer and the harmed and self-harm would therefore seem to fit within this category.



**4.4.3** Marginal cases will no doubt exist between these two categories of physical harm. For example, if a tribal Labour Party supporter whacked a Conservative MP on the head in a debate over welfare policy it might not be clear whether this harm should be categorised as a macro or micro physical harm, or both. However, as long as such marginal cases are categorised *one way or another* in this chapter, and the impacts of MA and MP upon cases of these types are thereby considered, then the above distinction will have served its purpose.

**4.4.4** I assume that most macro and micro physical harms are safety-relevant harms. Although trivial harms in both categories may not be obviously safety-relevant – such as the harm exemplified by a paper cut – it is fair to assume in general that if instances of physical harm, both macro and micro, are reduced then levels of safety are thereby increased.

**4.5** *Psychological Harm*: As well as physical harm, we can also suffer psychological harm. Psychological harms can range from specific disorders such as Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD) through to simply being made to feel sad.

**4.5.1** However, in the rest of this chapter I focus on physical rather than psychological harm for two reasons. Firstly, although psychological harms can be safety-relevant, they are not as commonly safety-relevant as physical harms. For example, it is not clear – short of the addition of extra circumstances – that being made to suffer embarrassment when a friend makes a cutting remark about my dress-sense or my weight actually affects my safety. Secondly, even when psychological harms are safety-relevant, such as when an individual suffers from severe depression or from PTSD, these psychological harms often have their foundations in a physical harm – whether it is PTSD as a result of the physical trauma of warfare or depression as the result of some form of physical abuse in childhood. These psychological harms are distinct from the original physical harm, but instances of them would be reduced if background physical harms were also reduced. Rather

than pursue these issues in more depth I merely focus on the impact of MA and MP upon instances of physical harm for these two broad reasons. Thus, from this point when I refer to harms, I refer to safety-relevant physical harms unless otherwise stated.

**4.6** In the next section I begin the substantive debate and consider the first of three supposed advantages associated with the preservation of morality in relation to the promotion of safety.

### **5. Argument from Belief in Moral Reasons**

**5.1** The first of the grounds considered in this chapter for believing that MP, rather than MA, would better promote safety is that moral practice justifies continuing to think morally in ways that would seem to direct against acting harmfully – if morality is abolished then so are the grounds for belief in safety-promoting moral reasons. To pre-empt one possible objection immediately, I discuss morally-strengthened *motivations* in section seven and in this section focus entirely on the possible impact of a continuing belief in moral reasons which is no more reliably motivating than belief in other types of reasons.

**5.2** The argument from belief in moral reasons, as I name it, is based on the fairly obvious thought that if morality was abolished then we would lose the justification to believe in the existence of important safety-promoting moral reasons. For example, if morality was abolished, it would no longer be acceptable to believe that killing for personal financial gain was *morally wrong*; such actions would no longer be viewed as transgressing the normative instruction of a mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral property. This loss of moral justification would seem to make an increase in harm likely since moral reasons are often called upon in arguments, in the real world and outside of philosophy departments, which seek to direct individuals to either act in harm-reducing ways or to stop acting in harmful ways all together.

**5.2.1** As an example of the possible influence of belief in moral reasons, consider the grounds on which the campaign group Liberty has objected to the use of torture<sup>23</sup>:

“...during the ‘War on Terror’ our Government attempted to sidestep, ignore and undermine our legal and moral obligations to prevent torture.”

Liberty cited not merely a legal prohibition on torturing but also a moral obligation to avoid acting in this way. The ability to cite and believe in these types of moral reasons would be denied if morality was abolished.

**5.2.2** In addition, Tony Blair, talking of the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003, clearly felt that there was a moral component to his reasoning<sup>24</sup>:

“The moral case against war has a moral answer: it is the moral case for removing Saddam. It is not the reason we act. That must be according to the UN mandate on weapons of mass destruction. But it is the reason, frankly, why if we do act, we should do so with a clear conscience.”

Given the lack of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and Blair’s continued defence of his decision to intervene in 2003, it might be suggested that belief in moral reasons prescribing invasion was even more powerful in influencing his decision than the quote above suggests. However, irrespective of this fact, it is clear that reasons that are believed to be moral are taken seriously by a great many people when they decide how to act – including world leaders. If moral beliefs generally prescribe against harmful behaviour and towards safety-enhancing behaviour, as they initially seem to, then the loss of the ability to believe in moral reasons for action would seem to make it more likely that people would act in harmful ways. An important buttress against acting in ways that are prudentially advantageous, but harmful to others, would appear to be lost.

**5.3** This type of worry regarding the choices that people would make if they could no longer believe in supposedly mind-independent, categorically

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/no-torture-no-compromise>

<sup>24</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/2765763.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2765763.stm)

prescriptive moral reasons directing them away from harmful behaviour is captured in the following sentiments. Without moral beliefs, Blackburn (1985:8) was concerned that people would be:

“...more likely to do the most terrible things.”

In addition, Garner (2007:501) says of Mackie that:

“He [Mackie] argued that if we supplement social practices like recognizing property and keeping agreements with the moral overlay, then people will be more likely to leave our possessions alone and to abide by their words.”

Mackie clearly felt that a belief in moral reasons was required to stop an increase in the number of people who stole from others (perhaps violently) or broke promises – without a belief in moral reasons to act as a counterweight, self-interested reasoning might make such practically harmful actions deeply attractive in any number of circumstances.

**5.3.1** Hinckfuss (1987:2.2) also suggested that it is a common view that if a society was more moral, as opposed to being either immoral or amoral, then that society would be a less physically dangerous place. Belief in moral reasons directing individuals to think of the welfare of others seems to help to make the world a less harmful, and a safer, place.

**5.4** However, I do not accept that the loss of belief in moral reasons directing individuals away from harms would have such a negative impact upon levels of safety. It is correct that it would no longer be acceptable to believe in the existence of moral reasons given MA, but we should not ignore the instrumental reasons for behaviour that would, if not be identical to moral reasons, move into a more prominent position in our deliberations. This is crucial because those people who value safety would continue to have non-moral instrumental reasons not to act in ways that would harm others. The possibility of substituting non-moral instrumental reasons for moral reasons therefore seems to undercut the worry that people would lack reasons not to harm others if morality was abolished.

**5.4.1** However, it is not obvious that in practice such safety-focused instrumental reasons would typically replace moral reasons in deliberation. In section five of Chapter Four, I made clear that people had instrumental reasons to act in ways that promoted the goods and ends that they valued. It is far from clear, however, that *most* people value personal and social safety as ends worth promoting. Wolff (2006:411) makes clear the fact that:

“...safety has a price, in terms of its impact on other things we want or value.”

Thus, many are unwilling to:

“...eliminate fatal road accidents by lowering the speed limit to 10 miles per hour [or to end] injuries to coal miners by closing the mines.”

Whereas by preserving belief in moral reasons we preserve belief in apparently strong reasons not to act in safety threatening ways irrespective of our own circumstantial desires or values, instrumental reasons to value safety are entirely dependent upon such circumstantial desires and values and thus seem to be far more limited in scope than moral reasons in respect of justifying safety-promoting behaviour. In practice, if we value other ends, such as travelling quickly or having electrical power, more than we value safety (particularly the safety of others), then we would not seem to have the ability to call upon the type of robust reasons to act in safety promoting ways as we would have if morality was preserved.

**5.5** However, the above, as a characterisation of how much most people value safety, is misleading. While it is clear that safety is not often the ‘pinnacle’ or most important good for most people in any one context, this does not imply that it is not a good that most people value extremely highly in most situations. Indeed, the fact that fairly restrictive speed limits are often in force around the world, and that companies are often legally obliged to take strong health and safety measures to protect their workers, suggests that safety is heavily weighted in the balancing of the different goods and ends that people typically value.

**5.5.1** This common valuing of safety as an important good is reflected in various studies. According to Jones-Lee et al. (1998:20) respondents in a study thought along common lines:

“First, any safety-improvement is seen as a “good thing”, with the precise magnitude of the risk reduction being treated as of only secondary importance.”

For most people, the common view is that safety is a good whose promotion is always attractive. In addition, and more concretely, Johannesson et al. (1996:272) found that:

“Based on estimates of willingness to pay for the risk reduction, the implied value of a statistical life can also be estimated. [For the average Swede], the value of a statistical life varies between SEK 30 million (\$4.5 million) and SEK 59 million (\$8.9 million) for private risk reduction. For public risk reduction, the value per statistical life varies between SEK 17 million (\$2.6 million) and SEK 49 million (\$4.7 million).”

The fact that in this particular study people were willing to pay slightly more for private risk reduction schemes rather than for publicly focussed safety measures should not obscure the fact that the average Swede was strongly inclined to pay not insignificant amounts of money for public risk reducing programmes. In addition, Johannesson et al. (1996:273) conceded that their results contrasted:

“...sharply with those reported in some previous studies of the value of risk reductions. Both Jones-Lee et al. (1985) and Viscusi et al. (1988) report a positive [‘willingness to pay’] for altruistic concerns.”

Perhaps, as Johannesson et al. (1996:273) suggest, car owners in Sweden already feel taxed enough and are so especially disinclined to pay even more money for public safety measures. However, whether or not Johannesson et al. (1996) are generally correct, or Jones-Lee et al. (1985) and Viscusi et al. (1988) are generally correct regarding most people’s willingness to pay more for our own safety or for the safety of others, it is clear that most people are willing to fund, with not insignificant sums from their own pocket, measures that promote safety as a personal and social good. The evidence backs up the

intuitively clear fact that most people value the safety of themselves, their loved ones and those who they may never have a personal connection with very highly indeed, irrespective of the precise differences in importance accorded to these differing groups.

**5.5.2** In addition to these studies, the value that we place upon the safety of others is also further evidenced by the phenomenal success of various charity appeals around the world. The British public, for example, donated a collective £100,331,808 to the 'Red Nose Day' appeal in 2013.<sup>25</sup> Britain, of course, has no monopoly on charitable giving.<sup>26</sup> While various debunking explanations could explain parts of the totals achieved by charity campaigns without resorting to calling upon a general desire to make other people safer, for example reference could be made to the enjoyment had by fundraisers or the social advantages enjoyed by such individuals, these debunking explanations cannot plausibly explain the totals that are replicated, and often increased upon, year on year. Indeed, the social advantages enjoyed by those who are viewed as actively generous in charity campaigns would seem to be dependent upon a widespread acceptance that giving in order increase the welfare, and the associated safety, of others is important; this explanation would further support my case.

**5.5.3** If belief in moral reasons for action was abolished post-vindication of MET, it does not appear that we should expect levels of harm to increase. Where belief in moral reasons once directed individuals to reducing harm, so instrumental reasons would, for most people, issue the same normative guidance. Most people, valuing the safety of themselves and others, would have pressing instrumental reasons to act in ways that promoted safety. Whether it be it Blair's moral case for war, Liberty's case against torture or a charity's appeal for support, instrumental reasons could take the place of previously accepted moral reasons that were invoked to justify acting in apparently harm reducing and preventative ways.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.rednoseday.com/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/top-charities/list/>

**5.6** However, MP supporters may well not be satisfied by the above suggestion. This is because they may believe that any common concern for safety as an important good to be promoted is *only so common because of the presence of a moral practice*; appreciation of safety as a personal and social good may be *predicated* upon belief in the existence of moral reasons that prescribe the promotion of safety as a morally valuable good.

**5.6.1** If any common desire to promote safety would be significantly undermined by the abolishment of morality, then the Moral Abolitionist would be guilty of throwing the baby (a general desire to promote safety) out with the bath water (belief in morality). However, there are two serious problems facing those who suggest that the general concern for safety is predicated upon belief in the existence of moral reasons that favour safety enhancing behaviours.

**5.6.2** The first problem for the above view is that it assumes that moral beliefs typically favour safety enhancing behaviours. If it turns out that moral beliefs are not so normatively reliable in terms of directing individuals to risk-reducing, safety enhancing behaviours, then the evidence that most people do value safety would not seem to be well explained by the presence of such moral beliefs. However, I wait until sections eight and nine to argue that moral beliefs do not, reliably, prescribe safety enhancing behaviours and that, as such, a continuing belief in the existence of moral reasons will not reliably motivate safety-promoting action.

**5.6.3** The second problem for the view expressed in 5.6 and 5.6.1 is that it seems overly pessimistic to believe that morality is the crucial force that grounds a general concern for the safety of ourselves, and perhaps more relevantly, both near and distant others. Clearly, as it stands, this response is mere speculative assertion. However, in Chapter Six I argue that the abolition of morality would better promote prosocial behaviour when compared to the preservation of morality in part because human beings are naturally altruistic. If that case is vindicated, and we are more inclined to behaviour that benefits



society in a broad sense after the abolition of morality, then we would thereby be very likely to be presented with instrumental reasons to act in ways that enhance safety regardless of the abolition of morality.

**5.6.3.1** I will not, here, sketch (in an unhelpfully truncated way) the arguments that form the backbone of the next chapter. Thus, I am left to assume that the general concern for safety, which gives rise to instrumental reasons to act in safety promoting ways, is not predicated upon a continuing belief in the legitimacy of particular moral reasons. This is not to duck an important issue, but merely to suggest that the argumentative gap will be closed in the next chapter rather than this chapter.

**5.7** In spite of putting off a full defence of the idea that a general concern for safety is not predicated upon a continuing belief in morality until the next chapter, I have in this section argued that instrumental reasoning can adequately replace belief in moral reasons in respect of guiding individuals to act in ways that promote safety. Given the common concern with the safety of others that most people share, most people would still have instrumental reasons not to violently steal another's possessions for personal gain, not to engage in a bloody war purely for national self-advantage and not to respond to annoyance with physical violence even if morality was abolished. The abolition of morality is not likely to undermine the promotion of safety in virtue of the removal of belief in moral *reasons* to act in ways that promote safety and not to act in ways that undermine safety; where there was belief in moral reasons, let there instead be belief in instrumental reasons for safety-promoting actions.

## **6. Argument from Value Outliers**

**6.1** In section five, I suggested that *most* people would have instrumental reasons to act in ways that promoted safety even after the abolition of morality. However, the case for MP may be strengthened if we consider the

impact of moral thinking upon those *value outliers* who would not have instrumental reasons to act in safety enhancing ways. These individuals would not have such instrumental reasons because, unlike most people, they fail to personally value either their own safety or, more likely, the safety of others.

**6.2** It cannot be denied that there are people, pre vindication of MET, and that there would be people post abolition of morality, who would not value either their own safety or the safety of others. Indeed, it is especially plausible that there are many people who, whilst they do value their own safety, have very little or no concern for the safety of those others whom they have no positive personal relationship with. It cannot be denied that such people would fail to have instrumental reasons to act ways that promote the safety of others. However, if morality was preserved, these individuals might continue to take themselves to have mind-independent, categorically prescriptive moral reasons to act in safety enhancing ways. This fact alone might seem to be enough to show that the abolition of morality would be costly in virtue of removing belief in significant safety promoting moral reasons from the minds of the very types of people who might seem to be most in need of belief in those reasons. Consider a brief example.

**6.2.1** Leroy does not value the safety of anyone beyond his immediate family and friends to any meaningful degree. Out on a Friday night, Leroy is annoyed by a drunken reveller at a club. Leroy, deliberately respecting his moral duty, does not punch the annoying reveller even though he would very much like to do so.

**6.2.2** If morality was abolished, and Leroy no longer took himself to have a moral duty to avoid acting violently, then short of an instrumental reason to care about the safety of those around him, Leroy would appear to be more likely to knock the annoying figure in the club onto the floor. If Leroy, and those of his ilk, were prone to more violence and less harm reducing behaviour following the abolition of morality, then preservation would seem to be the option that would best promote safety in virtue of limiting the

threats posed by these types of individual. Indeed, perhaps it was consideration of people like Leroy, rather than consideration of 'normal people' who do value the safety of others, which so concerned Blackburn and Mackie as described in 5.3.

**6.3** As in section five, the Moral Abolitionist has options in terms of responding to this MP-friendly argument. Three responses are detailed below.

**6.4** The first response, that I do not take to be particularly strong, is to suggest that the impact of such value outliers would be so negligible so as to be insignificant to the wider analysis of the effects of MA and MP upon levels of safety. On this view, since only a statistically irrelevant number of people would be genuine value outliers, lacking instrumental reasons to care for the safety of others, the impact of this small group of people should not be allowed to skew the wider analysis.

**6.4.1** However, despite the evidence cited in section five suggesting that most people do value safety as a personal and social good, this is not a response I take particularly seriously. Given the level of harm that even one single value outlier could cause as a serial killer or a tyrannical leader for example, the lack of *any personally relevant reasons* to avoid harming others for such people is significant enough to be a problem for MA even if the class of people without those reasons is small. If the attraction of harmful behaviour to value outliers is not unfettered by opposing moral beliefs in the setting where morality is abolished, then the balance may indeed be tipped in favour MP in terms of deciding which practice better promotes safety post-vindication of MET.

**6.5** The second response to the problem as stated is based on the thought that MA and MP face a similar problem in respect of value outliers. As suggested in 5.6.2, I discuss in sections eight and nine the ways in which belief in moral reasons, far from advising individuals to act in safety enhancing ways, can be used to justify the most appallingly harmful actions. Thus, even if value outliers such as Leroy might act in harmful ways given the abolition of morality, where they would not act in such ways if morality was preserved,

other individuals might act in equally (and more) harmful ways given the preservation of morality, where they would no longer act in these ways if morality was abolished. Although some individuals, free from the straightjacket of belief in moral reasons, may act more harmfully, others may act far less harmfully if moral justification for harmful behaviour was abolished. Again, I return to this point in sections eight and nine.

**6.6** The third response, which I do fully pursue in this section, is based on the fact that many useful resources would still in place to deal with value outliers, and mitigate the harms that such individuals might seek to cause, even after the abolition of morality. For example, we, as non value outliers, would have instrumental reasons to limit the harm that value outliers could cause. In addition, value outliers themselves might have non-safety-grounded instrumental reasons to avoid harmful behaviour in a great many circumstances. I consider the impact of the former suggestion initially.

**6.6.1** In terms of our ability to constrain harm-causing value outliers, it must be recognised that the abolition of morality would not lead to the abolition of all forms of non-moral approbation and control. The abolition of morality does not entail the abolishment of a legal system that punishes harmful behaviour, as Garner (2012:26) suggests<sup>27</sup>:

“Error Theorists [nor Moral Abolitionists] are not [necessarily] anarchists. Like almost everyone else, they will want laws to protect themselves and others from human predators...They will not consider themselves *morally* bound to follow the laws of their state, or even the conventions of their society, but there is no reason to think they will conform to those laws and conventions any less than moralists.”

Perhaps, as Garner also suggests, a greater focus on rehabilitation and public safety may characterise the legal system that exists post abolition of morality - given the removal of desires for moral retribution. However, regardless of this specific possibility, it is clear that for those people (most people) who do value the promotion of safety, instrumental reasons would exist supporting

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<sup>27</sup> The page reference is located in Chapter Eleven of Garner’s book

the upholding and respecting of legal institutions and associated functioning criminal control systems; most individuals would have instrumental reasons to support the catching, imprisonment and rehabilitation of those who have harmed and/or might harm again in the future. A lack of moral reasons to engage with policing does not unduly undermine the role and justified presence of the police and legal system in society. Given MA, it is not the case that value outliers would be free to harm at their own discretion.

**6.6.2** In terms of the instrumental reasons to act in safety-enhancing ways possessed by value outliers themselves it must be remembered that many such individuals would likely undermine their ability to secure the goods and ends that they do take to be of value if they acted in harmful ways. For example, if liberty of movement was a precondition for the securing of a subjectively valued end – as is likely is with many ends – then value outliers who also valued, for example, personal wealth, holidaying or other luxuries, would continue to have instrumental reasons to avoid acting in harmful ways given that harmful behaviour may result in their being cautioned by police and ultimately having their liberty curtailed.

**6.6.3** Returning to the example of Leroy from 6.2.1 makes point this clearer. Leroy might not have an instrumental reason to avoid punching the annoying man in the club that is grounded by a general concern for safety, but he may have an instrumental reason not to punch the annoying man that is derived from his desire not to be arrested by the police and potentially lose his job because of a criminal conviction. In addition, other value outliers might also have instrumental reasons to act in positive ways that make people safer, if doing so advances their social standing and/or potentially improves their career prospects and/or their attractiveness to potential partners.

**6.6.4** It cannot be ignored that some people, in situations where they do not risk being caught and do not risk undercutting their ability to secure other subjectively valued ends, might lack instrumental reasons not to engage in harmful behaviour. However, this group of people – at the height of the

criminal underworld perhaps, if police dramas are anything to go by – are quite likely to harm others irrespective of any belief in moral reasons that offer different normative guidance. The abolition of morality is unlikely to increase, significantly, the harms carried out by people who are not at risk of being imprisoned or losing a positive public persona and who do not value the safety of others.

**6.7** Thus, even given the actual existence of value outliers as described, I suggest that the abolition of morality would not lead to a significant increase in harm. Value outliers would often have prudentially grounded instrumental reasons not to act harmfully and, in addition, would be subjected to the effects of a criminal control system if they did act in harmful ways. The class of individuals that may act on instrumental reasons to harm others – if doing so did not undermine their ability to secure any of their other desires or ends – is quite likely made up of individuals already likely to be involved in harmful behaviour irrespective of the widespread acceptance of morality. Those who do not fear being locked up or losing a job as a result of acting harmfully are likely to already be involved in harmful behaviour even in the context where moral reasons are commonly believed; the abolition of belief in moral reasons would not unduly impact the behaviour of such individuals.

**6.7.1** I am willing to concede that the abolition of belief in moral reasons may, in a tiny number of individual circumstances, encourage some value outliers to engage in types of harmful behaviour that would not be so appealing to them if a belief in moral reasons was preserved. However, this sub-class of an already minority group of value outliers is very small indeed. If this tips the scales in favour of MP as the practice that better promotes safety, then it does so by the smallest margin. In sections eight and nine I suggest that the scales will ultimately tip back in favour of the abolition of morality by a much wider margin.

## **7. Argument from Weakness of Will**

**7.1** To this point, I have focussed on the possible impact of moral practice in terms of the guidance to act in safety-promoting ways that could be derived from continuing to think morally. I have suggested that a continuing belief in the existence of moral reasons is not crucial to the promotion of safety, because most normal people would have instrumental reasons to promote safety irrespective of morality and even most value outliers would have instrumental reasons not to harm others irrespective of morality – such value outliers may perhaps even have instrumental reasons to engage in positive behaviour that prevented others from being harmed irrespective of morality. For all this talk of the preservation or abolition of belief in moral reasons, however, I have not discussed the potentially special impact of moral *motivations*. This omission is corrected in this section.

**7.2** It is important to discuss moral motivations because understanding what it is to be morally motivated may make clearer a possible important advantage for MP over MA. The true value of belief in moral reasons, in terms of the promotion of safety, may not be merely in the direction of the normative guidance that such believed moral reasons seem to offer (for this can be replicated by instrumental reasons) but in the motivational salience of moral reasons for those people who accept them and take them to be important. In essence, people may judge that moral reasons are weightier than instrumental reasons and belief in such moral reasons may therefore be more likely to provoke action than belief in instrumental reasons would be.

**7.2.1** If a belief in a moral reason to act is more likely to engender action compared to belief in an instrumental reason to act, then belief in moral reasons may help us to overcome *weakness of will* in situations where we can act in ways that would promote safety but might not do so. By weakness of will, I follow Mele (2010), as described by May and Holton (2010:342), in taking a person to exhibit weakness of will:

“...*either* by acting contrary to one’s evaluative judgment *or* by acting contrary to one’s plan.”

**7.2.2** The basis for the view that belief in moral reasons may be helpful in respect of aiding an individual to overcome weakness of will, and thereby promote safety if this is his goal, is captured by Joyce (2001:181):

“Morality...imbues certain desirable actions with a “must-be-doneness”, which raises the likelihood of their being performed.”

The must-be-doneness of actions that individuals take to be prescribed by moral reasons is related to the categoricity associated with apparently moral reasons; moral reasons that an individual takes to exist may be thought to weigh heavier in deliberation than non-moral instrumental reasons. If this is the case, then a belief in moral reasons may be more likely to aid an individual in overcoming weakness of will. An example makes this line of thought clearer.

**7.2.3** George is tired after a long day at work and is looking forward to reclining in his favourite chair as he watches an old episode of Stargate Atlantis. However, on his way home George notices the date and recalls that he promised to help out at a ‘life skills’ session at his local youth offender institute. George judges, on balance, that he should help at the institute. However, George finds it particularly difficult to find the motivation to do so rather than to head back to his warm house, his pizza and his television. George is faced with what seems a live and personally difficult choice – either return home and relax, or trudge back out into the evening and help those in need as he feels he should.

**7.2.4** It is plausible that George would be more likely to overcome his weakness of will if he believed that the ‘should’ in regards to helping troubled young people was a moral, rather than an instrumentally grounded, ‘should’. Thus, even if George had an instrumental reason to help those who he can help (for helping others is an end that George values), he may be likely not to heed that instrumental reason and instead head home to relax if he does not



also judge this action to be morally called for. On the contrary, if George does accept that he has a mind-independent, categorically prescriptive reason to help, then he may be better equipped to overcome his weakness of will and succeed in motivating himself to drive down to the local institute.

**7.2.5** If belief in moral reasons had a positive impact upon levels of motivation to act in safety-promoting ways, then the preservation of morality may better promote safety. George, recognising his instrumental reasons, may decide against heading to the institute. However, if George took himself to have a moral reason in addition to his instrumental reason, then he would seem to be more likely to head to the institute rather than head home, thereby helping to provide young offenders with key life skills that might encourage less harmful reoffending in the future. When promoting safety becomes hard and we run the risk of succumbing to weakness of will, belief in moral reasons may encourage safety enhancing behaviour in a way that belief in instrumental reasons does not.

**7.3** If the above is correct, the victory for MP in the context of this chapter would be very comfortable indeed. This is because safety enhancing behaviour often requires robust motivation to be seen through. For example, not only must individuals sacrifice time to promote safety as with George in 7.2.3, the promotion of safety also requires bravery from soldiers, dedication from politicians, a sacrifice in income from volunteers and from those who change careers and leave more lucrative private sector job opportunities behind and selflessness from people who simply want to spend more time with their own family but, instead, work to improve safety abroad. Many more examples could be offered in more detail but I take the point to be clear enough – if a belief in moral reasons helps individuals to overcome weakness of will then safety may be better promoted by the preservation of moral belief, for safety promoting behaviour often requires a very strong motivational commitment.

**7.4** Despite the above being conceptually plausible, in this section I show how weakness of will can be overcome via the presentation of non-moral reasons, via the utilisation of emotion and via the use of rhetoric – techniques for motivating that do not have any necessarily moral components. Thus, I make clear that belief in a relevant moral reason does not necessarily make a person *more likely* to act in ways that promote safety – instrumental reasons can also carry the crucial motivational burden post abolition of morality.

**7.5 *Reasons Alone:*** The UK government has, in recent years, chosen to invoke risk-based language in order to change behaviour rather than focus on outlining apparently moral reasons for action. Rather than painting socially undesirable actions as morally wrong or morally inappropriate, the government has focussed on the risks associated with such actions in order to deter people from acting in these ways. Burgess (2015:28) suggests that in various government campaigns to encourage reductions in excessive eating, drinking or energy usage, for example:

“...the language of risk may have at least partially supplanted that of what is right and wrong.”

Rather than attempting to motivate individuals to reduce their eating or drinking by outlining their apparent *moral responsibilities*, government campaigns in these areas have instead highlighted to individuals that they should control their eating and drinking if, for example, they value their health, their job and/or their family. So, one oft-repeated advert designed to reduce drink driving focussed on the problems a person may have in their career and home life if they are caught drink driving, rather than on any suggested moral responsibility to protect others.<sup>28</sup> Moral condemnation has been replaced by the giving of instrumentally grounded reasons for action that strike a chord with most of the audience.

**7.5.1** In respect of a campaign to better regulate video-games via the imposition of age restrictions, Burgess suggests that what was originally a

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQtREndJKk>

morally justified campaign became, as time passed, framed in the non-moral language of 'risk' associated with children playing violent games. Burgess (2015:27) states:

“It can be argued that the risk-based arguments...performed a more effective role than the moral-based ones of [earlier campaigns].”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, if George, our character from 7.2.3, was struggling to find motivation to attend his local youth offender institute on a dreary Tuesday, or if an individual was wondering how much time to dedicate to a safety-promoting charitable cause, then the outlining of the basis of their instrumental reasons to help may be enough to enable them to overcome their weakness of will. If, for example, George was reminded of the possible suffering to be endured by others if he failed to help the young offenders, or another individual was reminded of the risks of inaction as it pertains to the conflict in Syria, then the weakness of will suffered by these two individuals may be conquered. Having our reasons for action clearly outlined, rather than hidden away in the back of our mind as we focus on short-term attractively lazy behaviour, may be enough to encourage action. Clearly, such a presentation of reasons will not always help an individual to overcome of weakness of will but this fact itself does not imply that belief in moral reasons would have any greater level of success – belief in moral reasons that direct safety-promoting behaviour will also not always help individuals to overcome weakness of will.

**7.6 *Reasons and Emotions*:** For his own sake, Burgess (2015:30) is unsure how motivationally efficacious the language of risk and the mere presentation of instrumental reasons actually is:

“[The language of risk] has extended far and wide, but it is not a compelling or positive imperative and it is in the absence of any other competing principle or idea that it holds sway.”

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<sup>29</sup> It must be noted that Burgess (2015:27) is sceptical of the value of such risk-based arguments in virtue of their promoting “further regulation that lacks any clear evidence base.” However, the issue here is motivation for action rather than whether or not the language of 'risk' in the world today actually favours actions that are genuinely helpful in reducing harm – this was discussed in sections five and six.

In addition, Burgess (2015:29) also says:

“Strikingly, however, the advance of these controversial issues [via the language of risk] has often met with little wider reaction or interest, despite an apparent expectation or hope among some politicians that they might. Boundaries of approval and disapproval have not been recast, sometimes scarcely even registering in society’s attentions.”

However, post abolition of morality there are other tools that can be utilised in order to motivate safety-enhancing behaviours. Beyond the mere presentation of instrumental reasons for action, emotions can also be elicited in order to motivate safety promoting action.

**7.6.1** One clear example of emotions being elicited in order to motivate safety promoting behaviour is the UK advert for the charity WaterAid, though the same technique is now almost ubiquitous across charity adverts and appeals.<sup>30</sup> The WaterAid advert involves a relatively simple presentation of some facts, which highlight (for most people) an instrumental reason to donate in order to relieve suffering in areas where clean water is hard to come by. However, the advert is not bland, it is highly *emotionally charged*. Images in the advert are of suffering children and the suggestion is that you, the viewer, can either help this child (and others like her) or not – this is a highly emotive suggestion.

**7.6.2** Given the power of our emotions to guide and influence our behaviour, the loss of belief in moral reasons in favour of safety promoting behaviour is no great loss if instrumental reasons, framed in emotionally effective ways, can also motivate the types of challenging and difficult safety enhancing behaviours earlier referred to. The fact that advertisers, like governments, have given up moral preaching and focussed instead on making an instrumental case to audiences in order to motivate behaviour is indicative of the success that such approaches can have. Preserving morality may preserve

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<sup>30</sup> A similar promotional video can be viewed here:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTu75U02m5g&list=PLc-oawSTIDS1z6Hy83tDtBd\\_kygk5BU1J&feature=c4-overview-vl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTu75U02m5g&list=PLc-oawSTIDS1z6Hy83tDtBd_kygk5BU1J&feature=c4-overview-vl)

a belief that some actions are categorically prescribed, but instrumentally grounded concerns for the welfare of others can be just as, if not more, motivationally salient for most people – especially when those instrumental reasons are presented to people in emotionally evocative ways.

**7.7 Reasons, Emotions and Rhetoric:** In addition to reasons and emotions, motivational rhetoric could continue to be of use even after the abolition of morality. As it has been historically, rhetoric could still be deployed by important figures in society in order to motivate other individuals to overcome any weakness of will and act in ways that promote safety.

**7.7.1** In demonstration of this fact, consider the (lack of) impact that the abolition of morality would have had upon two of the great motivational speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which, in their own ways, attempted to incite change to make the world a safer place amongst other things. Firstly, below is a transcript of part of Martin Luther King’s famed ‘Dream Speech’<sup>31</sup>:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed - we hold these truths to be self-evident: *that all men are created equal*  
[emphasis added].

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification;

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<sup>31</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3170387.stm>

one day right there in Alabama little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!"

In King's speech, the apparently moral claim that "all men are created equal" might seem to be the lynchpin that holds his entire case together. However, MA supporters no need not be concerned by such a statement of equality and can actively endorse it. This is because the claim that all men are created equal can be interpreted as a claim that 'no man or woman has any more intrinsic value than any other man or woman' – no-one is born with any more moral value than anyone else. Even if this reinterpreted claim is viewed as being a moral claim (and it is not clear that it need be so viewed), it is very obviously not a non-negative moral proposition and so would survive MET. The core point is that the MA supporter can happily endorse claims such as 'no-one has any more moral value than anyone else' because according to the MA supporter everyone is equal in respect of having no moral value at all. Perhaps King may have suggested that all people have some moral value and this is what makes us all equal, but what is crucial in this speech is *equality* between people whether that equality is based on the view that *all* people are morally valuable or *no* people are *morally* valuable; whites can claim no extra intrinsic or moral value given MET. If this claim seems to be less inspirational than the original moral claim, consider the potency of an argument based on the thought that 'you (the oppressor) are no *morally better* or *morally valuable* than me'.

**7.7.2** If there is no reason to take someone as having more intrinsic value or more moral worth than any other person – *and you value safety amongst other goods* – then King's speech will continue to be forceful when you read it; the motivating power of King's rhetoric would be undimmed for most people even if morality was abolished. Although King himself may have understood his speech as both morally and religiously grounded, these elements are unnecessary for the speech to persist in being motivationally forceful.

**7.7.3** Secondly, consider Nelson Mandela's speech in a South African courtroom as he faced the possibility of the death penalty in the 1960's<sup>32</sup>:

"Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent. I know this sounds revolutionary to the whites in this country, because the majority of voters will be Africans. This makes the white man fear democracy.

But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that the enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. Political division, based on colour, is entirely artificial and, when it disappears, so will the domination of one colour group by another. The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism. When it triumphs it will not change that policy.

This then is what the ANC is fighting. Their struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live.

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

As with King, Mandela likely felt a moral compulsion to proceed in his struggle against apartheid due to the prevalence of moral thinking in the world. However, even if morality was abolished, Mandela's speech in favour of a democratic structure for society that would promote peace and racial harmony (and therefore safety) would still remain powerful. There is little in the above that a Moral Abolitionist would desire to be rewritten and so, like King's speech, the motivational power of a Mandela figure would be undimmed so long as his rhetoric was grounded in instrumental reasons and the elicitation of emotions (or it could be reasonably interpreted as being located upon such logical ground).

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/23/nelsonmandela1>

**7.7.4** It is worth noting that this type of motivationally efficacious rhetoric has significant motivational power partly because it is, in the above examples, grounded by instrumental reasons that would appeal to many people. Rhetoric can of course motivate an action that a person does not have an instrumental reason to engage in, but such rhetoric is more open to rational challenge and likely not as reliably motivationally efficacious as rhetoric grounded in relevant instrumental reasons.

**7.8** In Chapter Six, in my discussion of how to promote prosocial behaviour, I also focus on how an individual's self-confidence, their level of empathy and the social expectations placed upon them (amongst other things) can impact their motivations. These factors, if developed and managed, could also aid people in overcoming weakness of will to act in ways that promote safety. However, rather than pre-empt this discussion I trust that the focus on reasons, emotions and rhetoric highlights how weakness of will could be reliably overcome even after the abolition of belief in moral reasons. Individuals will continue to be weak-willed no matter the choice between MA and MP in individual situations when it comes to acting in ways that promote safety, but there is no good reason to think they will be weaker willed as a result of the abolition of morality. Belief in moral reasons can motivate action and help to overcome weakness of will but so to can instrumental reasons for action that are properly framed and deployed using the motivationally efficacious techniques discussed in this section of emotion and rhetoric.

## **8. Argument from Moral Disposition to Interference**

**8.1** Thus far I have argued that MP has no significant advantage over MA in respect of promoting safety. In the final two sections of this chapter I argue that the abolition of morality would *reduce* instances of harm that are brought about as a direct result of the existence of a moral practice. I begin by discussing the potentially harmful impact of the moral disposition to interference.



**8.2** Moral belief, I argue, licences particularly harmful behaviour in a not insignificant number of circumstances that would otherwise would be less likely to occur. Typically, such morally-licensed harms occur when individuals are motivated *directly* by a desire to act morally, thus reducing safety-enhancing behaviour to, at best, a mere positive externality associated with this ‘moral’ behaviour. The examples below make this problem clearer.

**8.3** In the context where belief in moral reasons has been abolished and there is a common desire for safety to be promoted, a government may have no good reason to intervene in the decision-making of women regarding whether or not to have an abortion – at least in the very earliest stages of pregnancy. Although support and guidance may be offered through health bodies, the decision would very likely be left to the woman herself and those who she feels would be best to advise her – be that friends, family or medical professionals. Without belief in morally backed reasons on the scene, it is hard to see what would justify external or legislative interference in this process – it is not clear what non-moral end might be served by an interjection from an outside body or individual that is not entirely focussed on the well-being of the woman involved given that most people seek to promote safety.

**8.3.1** However, if morality is preserved, then it is plausible that abortions could be viewed as morally wrong (this often occurs today). This moral judgment would give people, entirely external to the situation, a belief in a moral reason to *interfere* in ways that could be exceptionally harmful to the woman involved and to related individuals. Thus, those who work at abortion clinics have been threatened, and even killed, by moral zealots.<sup>33</sup> In addition, morally motivated bans on abortion have fostered extremely harmful

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/abortviolence/stories/gunn.htm> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8076253.stm>

consequences as women have been forced to pursue amateur, back street abortions with, in many cases, sadly predictable outcomes.<sup>34</sup>

**8.4** A second example also highlights the possible danger of morally motivated interference. In the summer of 2013, in a small town in Bedfordshire, a man was returning to his car in a supermarket car park. He had been shopping with his disabled wife and, to save her the need of walking to their car, he agreed to pick her up from the store front. As he reached his car, a fellow shopper, who was not in possession of the full facts, approached the man and began an argument based on the fact that the car was parked in a designated disabled space when the man seemed perfectly fit and able to walk. The argument escalated and the returning driver was struck with a blow to the head, suffering a fatal injury.<sup>35</sup>

**8.4.1** I do not wish to claim any particular accuracy in describing the mental state of the aggressor in the above case. However, it is at least plausible to suggest that the conflict was escalated to the point of violence by a belief that the victim was *morally wrong* for abusing the disabled parking bay. The removal of this moral entitlement to criticise may well, in this case, have stopped the argument from escalating and may, in fact, have prevented the argument from occurring in the first place. The aggressor, perhaps feeling a moral justification for his interference, may have been emboldened by a sense of moral righteousness in his cause.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, we may wonder why he would be so concerned to the point of violence if he was not morally affronted in some way – this individual (assuming he was not a ‘value outlier’ and valued long-term ends and goods pursuit of which would be undermined by an arrest) seemed to lack a compelling instrumental reason to act as violently as he did.

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<sup>34</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/7041359.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7041359.stm)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-23568236>

<sup>36</sup> Former MP George Galloway once suggested that the assassination of Tony Blair may have been “morally justified” as revenge for his role in the Iraq war. It is a moral belief of this type, justifying harmful intervention for past moral indiscretion that I suggest may have been present in the example provided. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5020222.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5020222.stm)

**8.5** The general lesson from the two examples above is that belief in particular moral reasons may encourage interference in situations where interference can be harmful and where interference can instigate further harms. This is crucial, because although morality will encourage safety enhancing as well as safety-reducing harmful interventions, I have already argued in sections five to seven that morality has *no special advantage* in promoting such safety enhancing interventions or behaviours. Most individuals already have instrumental reasons to interfere in situations in order to promote safety and such individuals have the resources to overcome weakness of will should it occur in others without the need to invoke moral beliefs. If, in addition, the preservation of morality would be costly in virtue of supporting a potentially harmful disposition to interfere in situations that would not concern us if it were not for a belief in a particular moral reason, then the preservation of morality is more costly than the abolition of morality as it pertains to the promotion of safety. We may be disposed to interfere in many situations even post abolition of morality, sometimes with harmful consequences, but a belief in moral reasons seems to license more such harmful interventions as per the cases described.

**8.5.1** The examples above may be thought to be too specific to draw a general inference from. Yet, examples of the cost of morally motivated interference are not hard to come by. In certain parts of the world, women who have been raped are further punished for ‘engaging’ in morally shameful behaviour.<sup>37</sup> In other areas, those who have committed adultery have not been left to deal with their personal lives in their own ways, but instead have been stoned to death due to reasons at least partly grounded in moral belief.<sup>38</sup> In addition, some people have been killed for committing the apparently moral

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23381448>

<sup>38</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8347216.stm> and [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/25/world/middleeast/isis-stones-couple-accused-of-adultery-in-mosul-iraq.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/25/world/middleeast/isis-stones-couple-accused-of-adultery-in-mosul-iraq.html?_r=0)

transgression of being a member of an LGBT community<sup>39</sup>, while others have been locked up for committing an apparently moral transgression of posing for naked pictures on a local mountain.<sup>40</sup>

**8.5.2** Whether or not the particular cases cited are accurately described or not, justifications that are believed to be moral make harmful actions – that would not be prescribed for most people by considered instrumental reasons that take into account long-term desires - more likely to be both carried out by individuals and supported by others who might otherwise feel uncomfortable and argue against them. The abolition of morality would not stop harmful behaviour motivated by pure anger, or by economic gain, but it would eliminate the potentially moral justifications that encourage individuals to harmfully interfere in circumstances where they otherwise would not, as well as it limiting the willingness of others to let those harmful behaviours occur without opposing comment. If MA shares the benefits of MP, but does not share this cost, then MA has a clear advantage in respect of promoting safety.

**8.6** Prior to moving to the final substantive section of this chapter it is necessary for forestall one further objection. In section seven, I played down the motivational impact of belief in moral reasons by suggesting that such belief does not help an individual to overcome weakness of will any better than recognition of instrumental reasons that are perhaps framed by rhetoric or emotionally charged in their delivery. However, in this section I have argued that moral beliefs can motivate harmful behaviours that would be less likely to occur if such moral beliefs were abolished. There seems to be a tension in this position, for it seems as though moral beliefs must either make a negligible impact in respect of motivating behaviour (justifying the view that they do not help to overcome weakness of will, but undermining the view

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<sup>39</sup> <http://76crimes.com/100s-die-in-homophobic-anti-gay-attacks-statistics-updates/> and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/05/20/being-gay-can-still-get-you-killed/>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3114759/Malaysian-government-blame-naked-tourists-causing-deadly-earthquake-violated-sacred-mountain.html>

they motivate extra harmful behaviours) or moral beliefs must make a non-negligible impact in respect of motivating behaviour (justifying the view that they could motivate extra harmful behaviour, but undermining the view that they would make no difference in helping to overcome weakness of will). In short, it seems that I cannot legitimately downplay the motivational impact of moral beliefs where it suits me while playing up the motivational impact of moral beliefs in both this, and the next, section.

**8.6.1** However, the above misunderstands my view of the possible motivational impact of moral beliefs. Firstly, I accept that belief in moral reasons can motivate behaviour. Thus, a belief in particular moral reasons can motivate the types of harmful interventions referred to in this section. However, I deny that a belief in a moral reason for action *better* motivates an individual compared to a belief in an instrumental reason for action (that is framed in the ways discussed in section seven). Thus, in circumstances where people recognise an instrumental reason to act in a safety-promoting way but suffer from weakness of will, the addition of a belief in a moral reason to act will not help an individual to overcome that weakness of will any better than if that moral belief was not present; if rhetoric and emotion do not motivate action then we should not expect a moral belief to do so either.

**8.6.2** Yet, the supposition above does not undermine the arguments in this section regarding the dangers of morally justified interventions. This is because a belief in moral reasons is utilised to justify, and thereby better motivate, harmful behaviour in circumstances where an individual would not have an instrumental to act harmfully (assuming the individual is normal and values long-term ends etc.). Thus, the angry shopper, for example, utilises a moral belief to justify a desire to intervene that he could not utilise if moral beliefs were abolished. In the setting where moral beliefs are abolished, the angry shopper would not be able to justify intervention and therefore his intervention would be less likely to occur, though occurrence would certainly not be impossible if his anger was strong enough.

**8.6.3** It is therefore both the possible *content* of moral beliefs and the justification that such beliefs afford for the ignoring of safety-promoting instrumental reasons that makes them apt to motivate harmful behaviour to a degree that makes MP less attractive than MA post-vindication of MET if we seek to better promote safety. Instrumental reasons will rarely justify the types of harmful behaviours alluded to in this section post abolition of morality, whereas moral beliefs are clearly not so reliably safety-promoting.

## **9. Mechanism, Not Doctrine**

**9.1** One possible response to section eight is to suggest that moral beliefs need not point towards the kinds of harmful actions suggested in that section. If a preserved moral practice decreed that it was immoral to punish adulterers by harming them, or to engage in physical altercations in petty disputes, then that moral practice would not seem to be open to the line of attack pursued in section eight; indeed this may seem to have been at the core of Mill's (2003:80) ethical stance for example, for he says explicitly that:

“...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to *prevent harm to others*.”<sup>41</sup>

I make clear in this section why this type of response is unconvincing.

**9.2** *In the light of MET it is clear that there is no moral truth.* As such, no one moral proposition is any more legitimate than any other moral proposition; all non-negative moral propositions are as false as each other. Garner (2012:7-8) captures the effect of this fact upon instances of moral disagreement<sup>42</sup>:

“...if the critics of morality are on the right track, it is very likely that if two people who disagree about some moral question can stay cool, avoid gross errors, and keep talking, both can be declared rational and unrefuted. Moral philosophers have no

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<sup>41</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> The page reference is located in Chapter One of Garner's book

argument or device powerful enough to compel rational beings to accept their evaluations and principles.”

The implication of the above is that in preserving morality via any of the MP strategies outlined we could not convince all those who take adultery, homosexuality or illegitimate parking in a disabled space to be serious moral wrongs that they are making any *moral error* without invoking MET and thereby undermining any rival moral claim.

**9.2.1** MP must not be understood as a post-vindication of MET opportunity to preserve a *specific* moral doctrine. On the contrary, MP preserves a mechanism for moral thinking rather than any specific set of moral judgments. MP preserves the ability to make moral judgments but it does not prescribe a specific content for those moral judgments. Thus, MP would preserve the ability to believe in the types of moral reasons that were cited both in opposition, and in defence, of the 2003 Iraq war and 9/11, for example. This is a further reason for not believing that a general concern for safety as a valuable end is predicated upon the existence of morality – for the moral reasons that individuals take to apply to themselves are not always directed towards safety-enhancing behaviours, the opposite is often true. On the other hand, instrumental reasons will more reliably point towards safety-enhancing behaviours so long as most people value safety as an important personal and social good - as I have argued that they do.

**9.3** As it stands, this likelihood of fragmentation in the content of moral belief under MP (or, more correctly, this continuation and possible exacerbation of moral fragmentation) may not seem too serious of a problem. After all, if most people value safety, then perhaps most people might have instrumental reasons to believe in only particular safety enhancing moral prescriptions and not to believe in rival, harm-inducing, moral prescriptions. This is a possible view, though quite what positive reason would exist to add a moral justification to an instrumental reason to act in a safety enhancing way, given section seven, is unclear.

**9.3.1** However, Hinckfuss (1987) has outlined reasons for believing that if morality was preserved, it is unlikely that it would be utilised as a force for the promotion of safety, rather than as a tool for ends that might undermine safety. Hinckfuss discusses what he refers to as the *moral hierarchy* and outlines the ways in which moral practice can be used in a malevolent way as a mechanism for social control.

**9.4** The basis of Hinckfuss' concern relates to the way in which key figures in a society can exercise great control over the content of ordinary people's moral judgments. If Hinckfuss is correct, then those who might wish to encourage a moral focus on safety could be marginalised by those who, in more powerful positions, use morality as a tool for their own ends.

**9.4.1** Hinckfuss (1987:2.4) identifies that in moral societies, such as our own current society, people are generally brought up with a strong desire to act in ways that are morally right. However, although it may be technically fallacious to do so, many ordinary people look to figures of *moral authority* to inform them as to what the morally right and morally wrong actions are. Thus, children take moral direction from primary school teachers and parents, for example.

**9.4.2** Primary school teachers and parents also, however, are likely to seek moral direction from those who stand as 'moral superiors' to them – those positioned atop a societal moral hierarchy. Key figures in a moral hierarchy offer moral cues to ordinary people living their daily lives and help those individuals to decide what it is morally right and wrong. According to Hinckfuss (1987:2.4), such 'moral leaders' are likely to be particularly morally self-confident, for:

“...those who are convinced of their own goodness will be those most likely to become the moral leaders of society. In fact such moral self-confidence is a necessary condition for entry into the moral elite.”

This moral self-confidence is not, however, without its drawbacks. Hinckfuss (1987:2.4) suggests that:



“...with such self-confidence it is easy to believe that what one wishes for oneself is morally permissible, and how one wants others to behave morally obligatory. A good person will not want what is wrong.”

It is not surprising that a self-confident moralist would take themselves to be issuing correct moral cues to her audience, for as suggested by Garner in 9.2, *moral refutation* of a moral view is impossible so long as an individual does not trip themselves up and make a logical error.

**9.4.3** Hinckfuss (1987:2.4) identifies this moral self-confidence as exemplified by:

“...the priests and their pulpits, the newspaper editors and their editorials, the politicians and their platforms, the propagandists and their mass media.”

Those with financial advantage, skilled in rhetoric, or just supremely self-confident, can thus rise to powerful positions within the moral hierarchy and hold great influence over those seeking moral guidance in order to do what is right. This is, roughly, the mechanism through which the pop star can morally influence his fans, the newspaper editor can morally influence her business readers and the politician can morally influence her party members.

**9.5** The coalescing of such moral power in the hands of self-confident individuals at the pinnacle of the moral hierarchy is likely to encourage harm, rather than promote safety, in a non-trivial number of situations for two reasons.

**9.5.1** Firstly, established moral leaders can influence others to engage in harmful behaviour by giving that harmful behaviour a moral veneer. Throughout history monarchs and political leaders have utilised morality in order to convince individuals of the rightness of wars that have often been fought only for the advantage of those at the top of society. Whether it be a moral duty to fight for ‘Queen and Country’, ‘for the Empire’ or ‘for the Fatherland’, morality has been used by moral leaders to justify the most appalling and barbarously harmful campaigns. Moral reasons can be cited,

and non-moral pressure applied through legal and economic mechanisms, to encourage behaviour that most individuals do not have instrumental reason to engage in – instrumental reasons could of course be hidden from most people as far as possible in order to preserve the motivational impact of morally-backed directives. Again, this is not inconsistent with my view that a belief in moral reasons does not aid an individual in overcoming weakness of will in respect of safety-promoting behaviours because in the situations discussed in section five moral belief was claimed to be no more motivationally efficacious than recognition of instrumental reasons to promote safety – it had no special motivational advantage. However, in this setting moral beliefs are deployed in order to motivate behaviours in circumstances where individuals are either misled about their instrumental reasons or misled about the safety-reducing nature of the moral actions prescribed. The motivational impact of the moral directives would be considerably reduced by recognition, and proper framing (using emotion and rhetoric), of non-moral instrumental reasons to act otherwise.

**9.5.2** In a moral dictatorship, however, illuminating competing non-moral instrumental reasons effectively may well be easier said than done. Established moral leaders, possessing power and influence, will be highly unlikely to allow any threat to their position without attempting to control it. Members of the moral hierarchy will therefore be very likely to be disposed to issue moral guidance that protects both their interests and the structure and power of the hierarchy itself. On this basis, commonly accepted moral reasons are very likely to be directed against those who might threaten the moral hierarchy and the positions and influence of those at the top of the hierarchy.

**9.5.3** Again, this seems to have been in evidence throughout history. Conscientious objectors during World War One, for example, were often criticised as moral (worse than mere) cowards for failing to fulfil their ‘moral duty’ to protect the national interest (or, perhaps, the interests of those in

certain sections of the nation).<sup>43</sup> Posters suggesting that “England expects every man to his duty” and that soldiers should “Take up the sword of justice” reinforced moral beliefs regarding the rightness of enlisting but gave no voice to competing non-moral instrumental reasons to avoid fighting in the war. In New Zealand 2600 conscientious objectors lost their civil rights for refusing to participate in the conflict.<sup>44</sup> Outside of the context of WW1, many other leaders have also made it a moral taboo to question their authority – for every Mandela or King in a moral hierarchy, there have been more Hitlers, Stalins and Kim Jong-ils who have fostered morally backed cults to reinforce their positions.

**9.5.4** This ability to utilise belief in specific moral reasons to justify the leadership and decision-making of those at the top of society can be extremely harmful. It is likely that harmful leaders would be in a far weaker position in society if they could not utilise belief in moral reasons to support both their position and their decisions. As Hinckfuss (1987:3.6) says:

“Tyrants could, of course, still use fear to establish and maintain their position. Nevertheless, fear unaccompanied by moral charisma is a two-edged sword as many tyrants have found out to their cost when rebellion has finally broken out. Fear and moral constraints have different social consequences.”

If fear, rather than morality, is your only defence, then eventually brave individuals in society are likely to get their retribution, as many leaders have discovered. Maintaining control of hearts and minds is crucial for the maintaining of political control and morality is a very useful tool in facilitating this process via controlling the mechanisms people use to evaluate the merits of different possible actions. The abolition of belief in moral reasons would stop tyrants from citing such moral reasons in their own defence and for their own purposes.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2569145/Why-arent-khaki-Fascinating-archive-posters-urging-men-enlist-WWI-encouraging-wives-send-set-sell-20-000.html> and [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/york/hi/people\\_and\\_places/religion\\_and\\_ethics/newsid\\_834200/8342995.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/york/hi/people_and_places/religion_and_ethics/newsid_834200/8342995.stm)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/first-world-war/conscientious-objection>

**9.6** MA thus has an advantage over MP because the abolition of belief in moral reasons would undercut a mechanism for social control that can be, and has been, used for exceedingly harmful ends by those in positions of moral control at the pinnacle of the moral hierarchy. The fact that the preservation of morality would preserve a mechanism for thinking in moral terms, rather than any specific moral doctrine, opens up the possibility of moral reasons being cited for prudential advantage and for harmful ends.

**9.6.1** To be clear, I do not suggest that this will be the case in every society and every setting – this would be a claim of clearly absurd strength. However, given that the abolition of morality is no more costly than the preservation of morality as per the discussions in sections five to seven, the harms that result from moral societies of the type focussed on in this section are enough to make the preservation of morality ultimately undesirable if we seek the reliable promotion of safety across cultures. There is no need to open ourselves up to the costs associated with moral practice that have been evidenced in many societies throughout history. MP lacks unique benefits that could outweigh these possible and actual harms – harms that would be reduced if morality was abolished.

## **10. Conclusion**

**10.1** In this chapter I have argued that the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET, rather than the preservation of morality, would better promote safety as a personal and social good.

**10.2** I began by making clear the context of the discussion post-vindication of MET, as well explaining what safety amounted to as a personal and social good and justifying the focus on harm in the substantive sections of this chapter.

**10.3** I outlined three arguments designed to highlight the ways in which the preservation of morality might aid the promotion of safety. However, I

suggested that, in the light of the fact that most people value safety and have instrumental reasons to promote it, the preservation of morality has little to offer of unique value. In addition, in sections eight and nine, I argued that by abolishing morality we could avoid the harmful effects of both the moral disposition to interference and the moral hierarchy.

**10.4** Thus, I conclude that on balance the abolition of morality would better promote safety as a personal and social good compared to the preservation of morality. In the next chapter, I close any remaining argumentative gap that remains from my suggestion in 5.6.3 that a general and common concern for safety as an important good is not predicated upon belief in the existence of moral reasons. In that chapter I argue, more broadly, that prosocial behaviour is better promoted by the abolition of morality rather than by the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET.

## **Chapter Six: Promoting Prosocial Behaviour as a Personal and Social Good**

### **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In the previous chapter I argued that the personal and social good of safety would be better promoted by the abolition, rather than the preservation, of morality post-vindication of MET. In this chapter I argue that the abolition of morality would also better promote *prosocial behaviour* as a personal and social good.

**1.2** I begin by making the concept of prosocial behaviour clearer, as well as justifying its inclusion in this thesis as a key personal and social good against which the impact of MA and MP should be tested. To this end, I defend the view that most human beings have a natural disposition to altruism. I argue that the presence of this disposition suggests that, in addition to valuing safety as a personal and social good, they would also value prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good.

**1.3** Next, I outline five empirically supported mechanisms that aid the promotion of prosocial behaviour. I argue that these key mechanisms are non-moral in nature and could be deployed to make prosocial behaviour more likely regardless of the preservation of morality. I further argue that there are no distinctly moral mechanisms for promoting prosocial behaviour that increase the likelihood of such behaviour occurring.

**1.4** Specifically, I evaluate the impact of a *de dicto* moral desire upon levels of prosocial behaviour in order to assess whether such a desire could offer MP a unique advantage in this debate – a unique advantage that I claim a *de re* moral desire does not provide. However, I argue that *de dicto* moral desires make no net contribution to the promotion of prosocial behaviour and, on the contrary, are likely to justify and motivate non-prosocial, even antisocial, behaviour that would otherwise be less likely to occur.

**1.5** I conclude that the abolition of morality would help to reliably promote prosocial behaviour more so than the preservation of morality. The key mechanisms for promoting prosocial behaviour are entirely unaffected by the presence of a moral practice and the effect of preserving morality is likely to be overall negative rather than positive.

## **2. Prosocial Behaviour**

**2.1** It is crucial at the outset of this chapter to make clearer the concept of prosocial behaviour. To this end, the available literature on the topic is not short of examples of behaviours of this type.

**2.1.1** According to Warneken and Tomasello (2009:458) behaviours such as comforting, sharing, informing and helping are prosocial. Collett and Morrissey (2007:5) further expand on this list and include, as prosocial behaviours:

“...altruism, helping, organisational citizenship, philanthropy, volunteering, and cooperation.”

**2.2** A list of prosocial behaviours only takes us so far in illuminating the core concept. For one thing, the above behaviours seem to be contingently, rather than necessarily, prosocial. For example, helping a man who has fallen over back to his feet might count as a prosocial act, but helping a neo-Nazi to attack a synagogue is unlikely to be considered as being prosocial – it seems exceedingly unlikely that such an action could be an example of a prosocial act.

**2.2.1** Rather than relying on examples of prosocial behaviours to illuminate the concept, Clavien and Klein (2010:271-2) define prosocial behaviour as behaviour that:

“...benefits group interaction and increases cooperation in human societies.”

This definition explains why helping can be prosocial in one context but not prosocial in another. For example, when a man is helped back onto his feet after falling over this is an act that increases interaction and demonstrates cooperation. However, when a neo-Nazi is helped to attack a synagogue this act does not increase group interaction, broadly construed, for it damages relations between groups in society.

**2.3** However, this definition still does not seem to be quite right. If we consider a society where there is a small minority racial group who are useful scapegoats for some particular crisis, then volunteering for a racist political party may actually broadly benefit group interaction and cooperation more than it reduces it – the majority can unite in opposition to the minority. It is, however, somewhat counterintuitive to suggest that the helping of a racist political party can be prosocial.

**2.3.1** In response, the concession that such behaviour is prosocial is actually quite plausible. Perhaps there is no requirement on prosocial behaviour to always be non-parochial or to the benefit of *all* groups in society – prosocial behaviour might be considered as being only contingently desirable rather than inherently valuable. However, the Clavien and Klein definition of prosocial behaviour may be improved if we add a requirement for prosocial behaviour to both increase group interaction and cooperation and not be *antisocial* in so doing.

**2.3.2** According to the UK's Crime and Disorder Act of 1998<sup>45</sup>, antisocial behaviour is defined as behaviour:

“...that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household of himself.”

Thus, behaviour is prosocial if it benefits group interaction and social cooperation but does not do so at the expense of causing harassment, alarm or distress to either a person or a group of people. The helping of a racist

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/1>



political party would not, on this definition, count as being prosocial since it would involve the causing of harassment, alarm or distress to a minority racial group.

**2.4** Even this refined definition of prosocial behaviour has its problems, however. For while the Clavien and Klein definition may have been too broad and allowed too many types of behaviours to earn the label of being prosocial, the above refined definition may be too limiting on the types of behaviours that qualify as being prosocial. For example, a police officer may cause harassment and alarm to members of a criminal gang by putting them under surveillance and, ultimately, arresting members of the group when they act illegally. However, the police officer seems to be acting in an obviously prosocial way by arresting those who, for example, are trafficking drugs or other illicit items.

**2.5** The definition of prosocial behaviour thus offered is likely, therefore, to require even further refinement. Perhaps it may be the case that behaviour is prosocial if it benefits group interaction and cooperation and is not both antisocial and *illegal*. However, whilst this might allow us to describe the actions of the police officer as being prosocial, building the concept of legality into the concept of prosocial behaviour is only going to give rise to further odd apparent miscategorisations of pro and non-prosocial behaviours.

**2.5.1** However, there is only so much to be gained in the context of this chapter by further refining the definition of prosocial behaviour. I suggest that it is reasonable to move forward in the context of this chapter with an understanding that behaviour is prosocial when it benefits group interaction and cooperation and is not antisocial in the sense of harassing or threatening individuals or groups of people. Typically, though not necessarily, prosocial behaviours are those behaviours as outlined in 2.2.1. This understanding of prosocial behaviour may be rough around the edges, but marginal cases where it is not clear if an act is prosocial or not should not obscure the large set of cases where it is clear whether or not behaviour is prosocial. This is

enough for the purpose of this chapter, where MA and MP are evaluated in terms of their ability to reliably promote prosocial behaviour. An understanding and agreement on core examples of prosocial behaviours is enough to be undertake this project; marginal cases are not likely to have a significant impact.

### **3. Key Personal and Social Good**

**3.1** The question of which practice, MA or MP, better promotes prosocial behaviour is only relevant to this thesis at large if, as per Chapter Four, most people strongly desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour. However, unlike in Chapter Five and the discussion of safety, I have no studies to call upon in evidence of just how much people value prosocial behaviour in, for example, financial terms as none appear to be available in the literature.

**3.2** Instead, in this section, I make clear how prosocial behaviour can be understood as a *personal* and *social* good. In the next section, I give reasons for believing that most human beings are natural *altruists*. If this is the case, then I take it to be reasonable to believe that most people would care very strongly about the promotion of prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good in virtue of their natural altruism.

**3.3** To begin, I make clear the *personal* advantages for individuals if prosocial behaviour is promoted. If instances of prosocial behaviour are commonplace, and cooperation occurs in a multitude of different contexts, then this will help individuals to secure more of their own desired ends. Consider two examples to make this clearer.

**3.3.1** Matt desires to get back to his house after a long day at work. However, as he seeks to book a taxi to pick him up from the train station he discovers that his phone is out of charge. If people are generally helpful and willing to cooperate, then Matt may receive the use of another person's mobile phone to make a phone call, may be offered a lift back to his house or may be

offered some change to use a payphone to call a taxi. If people are less inclined to act prosocially, Matt may be ignored and face a long walk home.

**3.3.2** Julia desires that her village continue to be the pleasant and attractive place that it historically has been. However, Julia recognises that there has been an increase in littering in recent weeks. To combat this, Julia asks for volunteers to go litter picking, to pay for signs discouraging littering and to pay for the installation of new bins. If a disposition to prosocial behaviour is common, then Julia will benefit from the volunteering, philanthropy and cooperation of others and will secure her desired end of a clean village. If prosocial behaviour is not common, then people may ignore Julia's call for support and the village may continue to suffer from littering.

**3.3.3** Many other examples could be offered but it should be clear that if the disposition for prosocial behaviour is common then individuals will be better placed to secure more of their desired ends. This, in itself, gives people an instrumental reason to behave prosocially in general as a *personally valuable* good. Of course, individuals do not always desire what they have instrumental reason to favour, but as far as prosocial behaviour is understood as a personal good, I take it to be uncontroversial that most people desire such behaviour to be promoted in order to secure other desired ends. The way in which we often applaud helpful, philanthropic or cooperative behaviour is evidence of this standing desire for prosocial behaviour, qua personal good, to be more common.

**3.4** However, prosocial behaviour is also a social good in the sense that it allows other individuals to achieve their desired ends as well as it allows us to secure our own desired ends. I contend that even when individuals would gain no direct personal benefit from an increase in prosocial behaviour, most people would continue still to desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour. I justify this claim in the next section but below I outline two examples to make this reading of prosocial behaviour as a social good clearer.

**3.4.1** Clare is healthy and very well set financially speaking. However, Clare recognises that if prosocial behaviour is more common, then staff at two local hospitals will be likely to cooperate better. This will not aid Clare directly, for she has private medical care arranged at a different local venue, but she desires the increase in prosocial behaviour in order to improve health outcomes for others.

**3.4.2** Ryan is also well positioned financially. However, Ryan also desires an increase in prosocial behaviour, not for his own benefit, but for there to be greater levels of philanthropy that lead to a reduction in the number of people living in poverty around the world.

**3.5** Again, innumerable examples could be provided but the general message is clear – prosocial behaviour can be understood as a personal and *social* good. It is likely, as suggested in 3.3.3, that few will contend that most people do not desire an increase in prosocial behaviour in so far as it would further their own interests. However, it may be thought unlikely that most people strongly desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour as an important social good. In order to combat this concern, in the next section I provide evidence that human beings are natural altruists – evidence that makes the claim that most people strongly desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good very plausible indeed.

#### **4. Natural Altruists**

**4.1** In this section I unpick and defend the claim that most human beings have a natural disposition to altruism – that is to say that most people are disposed to altruistic desires prior to the effect of social factors such as morality. This is important for at least two reasons within the context of this thesis. Firstly, as suggested above, if human beings are natural altruists then it makes it very likely that most people strongly desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good. Secondly, if most people are natural altruists,

then it makes it very unlikely that any common desire for the promotion of prosocial behaviour (and the promotion of safety) as a personal and social good is predicated upon the existence of morality – thus I pre-empt a worry in this chapter and answer an objection to the conclusion of the previous chapter as laid out in section 5.6 of that chapter.

**4.2** In making the case that human beings are natural altruists it is first crucial to make clear exactly how I understand ‘altruism’, for usage of this term varies greatly across academic contexts.

**4.2.1 *Biological Altruism*:** According to Clavien and Chapuisat (2012:1) altruism as discussed by biologists is defined as:

“...a behaviour that increases other organisms’ fitness and permanently decreases the actor’s own fitness.”

Fitness, on this view, is defined as:

“...the number of an actor’s offspring that survive to adulthood”

**4.2.2 *Economic Altruism*:** Measures of fitness are irrelevant to the economic understanding of altruism. Instead, according to Clavien and Klein (2010:268):

“...economists label a behaviour as ‘altruistic’ if it benefits other individuals or the common good at some cost for the agent and if that cost cannot be compensated in the future.”

**4.3** The above two ways of understanding altruism focus on *actions* rather than *motivations* and in so far as they define altruism with reference to acts rather than intentions they are not relevant to this chapter. Rather, I suggest that humans are natural altruists in the sense defined below.

**4.3.1 *Psychological Altruism*:** Clavien and Klein (2010:269) state:

“If a primary motive is directed towards the needs and well-being of other individuals, it earns the label of ‘altruistic’.”

In addition, Schultz (2009:252) defines psychological altruism as:

“The existence of ultimate desires concerning the well-being of others”

Clavien and Chapuisat also (2012:4) suggest that:

“...altruism refers to an ‘energy, a force within the individual’ which drives the person to achieve an other-directed goal”

Finally, Joyce (2006:14) says that altruistic acts are undertaken:

“...with the intention of benefitting another individual, where this is motivated by a non-instrumental concern for his or her welfare.”

**4.3.2** What characterises psychological altruism is the existence of a fundamentally other-directed desire. The fundamental character of this other-directed desire is crucial as it pertains to the reliable connection between altruism (so defined) and prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good. In addition, although not mentioned by some of the definitions in 4.3.1, in order to be altruistic a fundamentally other-directed desire must also be *positive* rather than *negative*. This is to say that the fundamentally other-directed desire must be directed towards *benefiting* the other individual rather than be directed towards harming that individual or their interests in some way. Thus, a fundamentally other-directed desire to physically attack a neighbour is obviously not altruistic in the way that a fundamentally other-directed desire to help that neighbour would be. From this point, when I refer to altruism I refer to a *positive*, fundamentally other-directed desire unless specifically stated otherwise. The example below makes clear why the fundamentality of this other-directed desire is so important to the reliability of this connection.

**4.3.3** Rod and Amanda both have a desire to act in a philanthropic way by donating money to a local charity. However, Amanda’s philanthropic desire is fundamentally other-directed whereas Rod’s philanthropic desire is not fundamentally other-directed. Thus, Amanda is motivated to help others because she seeks to improve their life chances and for no other reason. On the other hand, Rod desires to help others only because by doing so he will be viewed more positively by his community and this may enable him to be

elected as councillor and enjoy generous financial allowances. Both Rod and Amanda's philanthropic desires will lead to prosocial behaviour so long as circumstances are such that Rod will gain a personal benefit from his philanthropy. However, it is clear that Amanda's fundamentally other-directed desire will more likely promote prosocial behaviour because she would be philanthropic regardless of outside circumstances that make such giving personally beneficial – her altruistic desire will lead to prosocial behaviour in nearly all circumstances whereas Rod's non-altruistic desire will lead to prosocial behaviour in a limited number of circumstances. Therefore, if the target is to promote prosocial behaviour, altruistic desires are exceedingly helpful in such a quest.

#### **4.4** According to Clavien and Klein (2010:269):

“...‘psychological egoism’ denies the possibility of primary altruistic motives”

Instead, according to Rosas (2002:98), the psychological egoist believes that:

“...when we aim at a benefit for others, it is only as a means of obtaining some benefit for ourselves.”

The psychological egoist thus explicitly denies the existence of human altruism. In defending the existence of human altruism, I intend to show the error of this view.

#### **4.4.1** The evidence in favour of the view that human beings are naturally altruistic is considerable. Warneken and Tomasello (2009:460) found that:

“Infants from 14 to 18 months of age display spontaneous, unrewarded helping when another person is unable to achieve his goal.”

Specifically, children in their study displayed spontaneous, unrewarded helping behaviour across a number of diverse settings where such behaviour was not easy for an infant of 14-18 months of age to display (2009:259). The children:

- Handed out of reach objects to another individual

- Stacked books when another individual was unable to complete the stacking
- Opened a cabinet door for another individual
- Opened a box for an adult who was using an incorrect method

As the authors put it:

“This initial experiment showed that 18-month old infants spontaneously provide instrumental help and do so in a wide range of situations.”

The lack of reward for those helping behaviours is crucial to justify the conclusion that these children acted altruistically. The infants did not act because they expected to receive a benefit or a reward but because they recognised that another individual was in need. According to Warneken and Tomasello (2009:460):

“Rewarding was neither necessary nor did it increase the rate of helping. Thus, what determined the children’s helping was the other’s unfulfilled goal, not an immediate benefit for themselves.”

**4.4.2** In a different study, Thompson, Barresi and Moore (1997:207) also found children apt to act in ways that they believed to be helpful to another person, without any suggestion of reward or personal gain from doing so:

“Most children in our study, regardless of age, chose to share in situations involving current desires”

Children in this study were happy to share stickers by placing them in another person’s sticker book rather than their own. Thompson, Barresi and Moore (1997:207) suppose that:

“Since the child and the research assistant both had their sticker books open and waiting to be filled, perhaps the child simply generalised from his or her personal desire to the research assistant’s desire.”



On this basis, it appears that once a child reaches an age where they can comprehend, or at least approximate, the desires of another that child is likely to have altruistic desires.

**4.4.3** Harbaugh and Krause (2000:107) also suggest that when children play a 'Dictator' game, requiring the allocation of resources, their behaviour implies:

“...that even young children have a taste for altruism.”

**4.5** However, for all of this apparent evidence the idea that people are natural altruists can be objected to. Although young children may have been shown to have a natural disposition to altruism, it may be objected that such a disposition does not persist into adulthood.

**4.5.1** This potential objection is buttressed by evidence of the self-interested behaviour that individuals seem to display around the world every day. Perhaps human beings 'grow out' of their childhood altruism in some form or other as they grow up and become more fully responsible for their own existence.

**4.5.2** However, this response to the data provided in 4.4 is far from convincing. Firstly, as Warneken and Tomasello (2009:455) state:

“It is a common observation that human beings, as a species, are extraordinarily helpful, even to non-relatives.”

In support of this view, it should be recognised how common it is for human beings to act generously – whether by running a marathon to raise money, giving up a seat on a train so a fellow passenger is not required to stand or paying for dinner when out with colleagues or friends. There seems, therefore, to be little reason to believe that altruism fades away.

**4.5.3** Of course, it is true that any natural disposition to altruism can be crowded out by more immediate and local concerns that encourage self-interested behaviour rather than behaviour motivated by altruistic desires. For example, a person might be naturally disposed to altruism but might have

been extremely angered by the conduct of a fellow passenger on a train and therefore chose not to lend them their mobile phone out of spite. The suggestion of this section is not that individuals will always have an altruistic desire in every circumstance, even one that gets defeated by a stronger self-interested desire, it is rather that human beings are *generally disposed* to altruistic desires, pending the impact of exterior circumstance. Indeed, it is also true that some individuals will not have this disposition at all – but the evidence suggests that such individuals are ‘outliers’ to the norm.

**4.6** Objectors to the view that the altruistic disposition persists into adulthood could yet attempt to debunk the types of exemplar altruistic acts referred to in 4.5.2. Perhaps paying for dinner with colleagues is based on a desire only to win favour, giving up a seat on a train is motivated by a desire to impress the attractive figure nearby who is also standing or running a marathon is motivated only in order to receive praise from others. Yet, these possible debunking explanations of apparently altruistic desires are not, by themselves, indicative of a wider truth. Given that there is positive evidence of altruism in children, and evidence of apparently altruistic action in adults, something other than a merely possible egoist debunking explanation is required in order to cast doubt upon the persistence of altruism between childhood and adulthood – the explanation of altruism that calls upon a natural disposition seems to be the best explanation of plausibly altruistic acts.

**4.6.1** In addition, Warneken and Tomasello (2010:464) also suggest:

“Chimpanzees also appear to have a basic motivation to act altruistically for others.”

On this basis, it is claimed that:

“...the phylogenetic roots of human altruism – at least in the form of instrumental helping – may reach as far back as to the last common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees some six million years ago.”

If human children show a natural tendency for altruism, and chimpanzees show a natural tendency for altruism, then short of harder evidence than the mere suggestion of self-interested explanations of apparently altruistic behaviour, it is legitimate to believe that human adults also have a natural tendency for altruism.

**4.7** As suggested at the outset of this section this conclusion is important for at least two reasons. The fact that most human beings have a disposition to positive, fundamentally other-directed desires suggests that most people will desire the promotion of both safety and prosocial behaviour as personal and social goods in the ways described in this and the previous chapter. In addition, the fact that this natural altruistic desire is evidenced in young children suggests that it is not the impact of a social moral practice that supports this altruistic desire.

**4.7.1** This conclusion regarding our natural altruism only enhances the importance of the discussion across both this and the previous chapter – for if we are naturally altruistic then the key question is how that natural altruism be best built upon and facilitated in order to promote key personal and social goods such as safety and prosocial behaviour. The answer of the MP supporter is that it can be best built upon and promoted by preserving moral practice, while my answer is that moral practice fails to support our natural altruistic tendency as well as related desires to promote the personal and social goods of prosocial behaviour and safety. In the rest of this chapter, I offer a substantive defence of the claim that the abolition of morality would better promote prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good (from here the ‘personal and social’ nature of the good of prosocial behaviour is assumed unless stated otherwise) by outlining the non-moral ways in which altruism can be facilitated as well the prosocial costs associated with preserving morality that are similar in nature to those costs associated with the preservation of morality discussed in sections eight and nine of the previous chapter with regards to safety.

## **5. Mechanisms to Promote Prosocial Behaviour**

**5.1** Most people, given sections three and four, have non-moral instrumental reasons to seek the promotion of prosocial behaviour. In all the examples that follow, I assume the presence of a non-moral instrumental reason to act prosocially for any character described unless specifically stated otherwise; the characters in the examples are thereby ‘normal’ rather than ‘outliers’. Evidence discussed below suggests that there are at least five key mechanisms that can help to facilitate any desire to act prosocially and thereby help to actually motivate prosocial action. In essence, the mechanisms discussed in this section are the mechanisms that help individuals to overcome weakness of will and act in prosocial ways by enhancing the motivational power of their prosocial and altruistic desires.

**5.1.1** Below, in turn, I outline the impact of a (1) positive temperament, (2) empathy, (3) confidence in self-efficacy, (4) social expectations and (5) modelled behaviour and past experience as they pertain to making it more likely that an individual will act prosocially.

**5.2** *Positive Temperament*: Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) suggest that:

“Research in this area finds that individuals with positive emotionality or temperament are likely to engage in prosocial acts, even when distressed.”

In this context, according to Walker (2007:96):

“...‘happy people’ [with a positive temperament] tend to be ones whose moods we would describe as ‘upbeat’ and who tend to experience a prevalence of positive emotions such as joy and contentment.”

Walker (2007:93) comments that:

“...the happiest among us are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour”

In evidence of the impact of a positive temperament upon a willingness to act prosocially, Walker (2007:97) says:

“A number of laboratory experiments also confirm the idea that happiness causes prosocial behaviour. The results are sometimes summarized as the ‘feel good, do good’ phenomenon. For example, experimenters might arrange it such that an experimental subject ‘just happens’ to find a coin. This typically provides a boost to positive affect in subjects, and the subject is subsequently more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour.”

In addition, Thoits and Hewitt (2001:124) found that:

“...people who were happier, more satisfied with their lives, high in self-esteem, in good health, and low in depression at Time 1 worked significantly more volunteer hours at Time 2...In short, consistent with predictions, personal well-being increased hours of volunteer community service.”

**5.3 Empathy:** In addition to the having of a positive temperament, Piliavin and Charng (1990:36) note that:

“Empirical studies have consistently shown that empathy is causally related to prosocial behaviour.”

In this regard, Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) state that:

“People who are more empathetic and are better able to take the perspective of the other are also more likely to help others with no expectation of return.”

Eisenberg and Miller (1987:115) also conclude that:

“...contrary to the conclusion of some prior reviews, the empirical data do provide support for the theoretical assertion that empathy is related to some forms of prosocial behaviour.”

**5.3.1** Again, anecdotally, examples highlighting the link between high levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour are not difficult to conjure. If I grasp the needs of another person, then I am more likely to help that person than I would be if I did not grasp their needs. Thus, if empathy is developed amongst the population at large then we can, *ceteris paribus*, expect instances of prosocial behaviour to increase.

**5.4 Confidence in Self-Efficacy:** Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) suggest that individuals who are “high in self-efficacy” are more likely to act prosocially. Individuals who are ‘high in self-efficacy’ are individuals who are confident in their own competence and their ability to affect a situation in the way that they desire. On this theme, Piliavin and Charng (1990:31) claim that individuals who are:

“...high in self-esteem, high in competence, high in internal locus of control...appear to be more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours.”

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that individuals who are high in self-efficacy are more likely to act prosocially. On this basis, in order to actually promote prosocial *behaviour*, rather than merely prosocial *desires* that do not lead to action, it is important to ensure that individuals feel confident in their own competence and in their ability to change situations in the prosocial way they desire; wanting to help someone, but feeling incapable of doing so, will very likely not lead to actual prosocial behaviour.

**5.5 Social Expectations:** Social pressure to behave prosocially is also likely to increase levels of prosocial behaviour. Lee, Piliavin and Call (1999:287), in discussing the prosocial act of donating blood, suggest that:

“Blood donation is affected more strongly by socialisation”

They also state that:

“Perceived expectations seem to have the greatest influence on past volunteering.”

If social expectations are such that people are pushed towards acting prosocially if they do not want to negatively stand out from the crowd, then instances of prosocial behaviour are likely, *ceteris paribus*, to increase.

**5.6 Modelled Behaviour and Past Experience:** In addition to social norms directing individuals to act prosocially, modelling of prosocial behaviour for others can also increase instances of prosocial behaviour. Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) state:

“When children are presented with a generous model, they are more likely to be generous themselves”

Thus, parents have a crucial role in encouraging their children to act in prosocial ways:

“Although there can be other models in children’s lives, parents are the most influential models cited by altruistic adolescents”

Collett and Morrissey do suggest that:

“...there is a declining effect of modelling over time. Younger children are more susceptible to the influence of modelling than older children, who have already internalized social norms”

However, the declining impact of modelling over time does not undermine the importance of modelling prosocial behaviour for children early in their lives – in their *formative* years - if we wish to promote prosocial behaviour. Indeed, Lee, Piliavin and Call (1999:288) also make clear the importance of parental behaviour modelling as it pertains to promoting prosocial behaviour:

“...it seems clear that parents can and do influence the development of attitudes and self-concepts related to participation in these forms of institutional behaviour. Modelling by parents can be the first step in leading young people to view themselves as community participants.”

**5.6.1** As well as modelling prosocial behaviour themselves, parents can also encourage prosocial behaviour by ensuring that their children act in prosocial ways. This will not give merely an immediate prosocial payoff, but will also encourage children to continue to be prosocial in the future when they are their own decision-makers. Lee, Piliavin and Call (1999:288) point to the importance of this mechanism:

“...the importance of past behaviour in both the development of helping identities and the prediction of intentions to help suggests that involving children and adolescents in volunteering, perhaps through “service learning”, could increase participation in all forms of community service.”

In particular, when it comes to donating blood, Lee, Piliavin and Call (1999:287) state that:

“...past behaviour is more important for giving blood than for giving time.”

Indeed, Lee, Piliavin and Call (1999:286-7) suggest that the past experience of giving is crucial for the creation of a person's altruistic role-identity; for a person to view themselves as an altruistic, and therefore prosocial, individual.

**5.6.2** If we wish to promote prosocial behaviour, then modelling prosocial behaviour for our children and encouraging them into prosocial action from a young age is likely to see them develop a taste for prosocial behaviour into the future – those who become used to seeing prosocial behaviour demonstrated by others, as well as acting prosocially themselves, are more likely to respond prosocially as a matter of course in a given context in the future rather than as a result of significant conscious reasoning. As someone who has never donated blood even though I take it to be a prosocial action that I desire individuals to engage in, then arguably had I been brought up in a house where blood donation was a common occurrence then I would have been more likely to become a blood donor myself.

**5.7** On the basis of this section I suggest that an individual who has a positive temperament, is empathetic, is confident in their own competence, is aware of a social expectation to act prosocially, has witnessed others so acting and has acted prosocially themselves in the past is very likely to act prosocially in the future. The mechanisms identified are important for encouraging more frequent instances of prosocial behaviour and making the link between the *desiring* of prosocial acting and *actual* prosocial acting stronger; these are the key mechanisms to be manipulated as best as possible in order to encourage such behaviour.

**5.7.1** Clearly, I do not assert that anyone who desires the promotion of prosocial behaviour and has a positive temperament and is empathetic etc. will *always* act prosocially, for this would be an absurdly strong claim. Rather I suggest that these are the key factors that make prosocial behaviour *more*



*likely* in individuals who have a desire to act prosocially (most people). Indeed, even for outliers who do not desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour such mechanisms may encourage prosocial behaviour – particularly, for example, the mechanism of ‘social expectation’<sup>46</sup>. As such, if these mechanisms can be controlled as variables in any meaningful way, then it will be possible to promote prosocial behaviour in a great many, although not all, people and circumstances.

## **6. Non-Moral Mechanisms**

**6.1** Having outlined key mechanisms for promoting prosocial behaviour in the previous section, I now evaluate the possible impact of MA and MP upon these mechanisms post-vindication of MET. I argue that the preservation of morality would have not have an overall beneficial impact upon our ability to manipulate the identified mechanisms in order to promote prosocial behaviour and that, therefore, the abolition of morality would not seem to reduce instances of prosocial behaviour. Below, I evaluate the possible impact of the preservation of morality upon each mechanism in turn.

**6.2** *Positive Temperament*: A person’s temperament is affected by both genetic and social factors. Although there may be ways of manipulating our genetic code so as to make a positive temperament more likely I shall not discuss the possibility of such techniques here since the preservation of morality is not at all likely to affect the likelihood of such genetic alterations in any clear way.

**6.2.1** However, it also does not seem to be the case that the preservation of morality would affect the social factors that make a positive temperament more or less likely. For example, stress events may make one’s temperament less positive, as may a lack of sleep. Yet, it seems unlikely that the preservation of morality would do much to reduce stress or increase sleep.

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<sup>46</sup> For example this is the basis of sociopaths’ behaviour.

Perhaps it might be suggested that stress would be reduced if the world was a more moral place since this may make the world, for example, safer and kinder. However, in the last chapter I argued that morality does not make the world safer – quite the opposite – and to claim that the preservation of morality would make the world a kinder place would be to beg the question in this chapter. In addition, Fritz et al (2013) have suggested that listening to music during exercise may lead to a more positive temperament but again the preservation of morality would seem to irrelevant to this temperament-affecting factor. Thus, there seems to be no reason to suspect that preserving morality would helpfully encourage behaviours that are relevant to making a positive temperament more likely.

**6.2.2** The point may yet be pressed via the suggestion that the preservation of morality would preserve those moral beliefs that might direct individuals towards focussing on how to help to improve both their temperament and the temperaments of those around them. So, for example, the boss of a factory may feel a moral compulsion to manage stress-levels in her workforce in order, ultimately, to promote morally valuable prosocial behaviour. In addition, a council leader may believe that she is morally obliged to take noise reduction seriously in order to help people sleep properly and thus, ultimately, increase levels of morally good prosocial behaviour. The addition of moral thinking may make such temperament boosting behaviours more likely.

**6.2.3** However, as I discussed in Chapter Four and will discuss again in section eight of this chapter, there is no guarantee that moral beliefs will have a normative content that directs individuals to act in prosocially promoting ways post-vindication of MET; MP preserves a mechanism rather than a specific moral doctrine. In addition, even aside from this issue that I return to later, most people will continue to have non-moral, instrumental reasons to act in ways that help to promote prosocial behaviour even after moral practice is abolished. In the last chapter I argued that moral beliefs are no more likely to help individuals to overcome weakness of will than non-moral

beliefs because moral beliefs have no unique motivational salience in the light of our ability to use emotion and rhetoric to (non-morally) motivate. Thus, it is hard to understand why preserving a belief in the legitimacy of moral reasons in this context would be beneficial. While moral beliefs can provoke stress-reducing and temperament-boosting behaviour, they are no more generally motivationally efficacious than compellingly framed instrumental reasons to act in the same types of ways. On this basis, it is reasonable to conclude that temperaments will be positive or negative to more or less the same degrees irrespective of the choice made between MA and MP post-vindication of MET.

**6.3 Empathy:** It may seem more likely that people would be generally more empathetic if morality was preserved post-vindication of MET. After all, empathy seems often to be demarcated as a moral virtue and as a characteristic that individuals believe themselves to be morally directed to promote or enhance.

**6.3.1** However, aside from issues relating to the preservation of a moral mechanism rather than a moral doctrine, again any belief in a moral reason to focus on promotion of empathy would be mirrored by a non-moral, instrumental reason for most people also to focus on the promotion of empathy. Thus, whether or not morality is preserved, individuals would likely take themselves to have a reason (either moral or non-moral and instrumental) to follow the advice from Warneken and Tomasello (2009:465) in respect of how, in practice, to strengthen levels of empathy:

“Prosocial behaviours are more likely to follow if adults are drawing the child’s attention to the feelings, needs, thoughts or intentions of other people...In other terms, inductive parenting draws upon the child’s other-regard – if another’s needs are highlighted, positive behaviours follow.”

In section three I argued that this ‘other-regard’ is naturally occurring for most people and therefore it cannot be suggested that empathy is dependent upon elements of a moral practice in order to get off the ground and impact behaviour. It is, therefore, quite plausible that empathy in individuals could be

effectively strengthened irrespective of the choice between MA and MP post-vindication of MET.<sup>47</sup>

**6.4 *Confidence in Self-Efficacy:*** There seems to be no plausible foundation for believing that an individual's confidence in their own self-efficacy would be enhanced by the preservation of morality. Instead, educational programmes that increase a person's confidence and self-esteem, as well as providing experience of success in respect of acting upon one's desires, would seem to be crucial in improving an individual's confidence in their own self-efficacy and thereby make their acting prosocially in the future more likely.

**6.4.1** It could be suggested, as before, that if morality was preserved then individuals might believe themselves to have moral reasons to attempt to set up these types of educational programmes and, more generally, to attempt to make people feel more confident in their own self-efficacy. However, to repeat the argumentative path now well-trod, if morality was abolished then most people would continue to have instrumental reasons to act in ways that boost others' sense of self-efficacy as well as their own. Thus, MP has no advantage here for the reasons already discussed in regards to the power of non-moral, instrumental reasons to motivate action.

**6.5 *Social Expectations:*** MP may yet seem to have an advantage over MA in respect of setting and effectively calibrating social norms that direct individuals towards acting prosocially and engender approbation upon those who do not act prosocially. Through the removal of a moral backing for prosocially helpful social expectations those who have no desire to act prosocially may feel a greater inclination and ability to act in the self-interested, and plausibly antisocial, ways that they desire.

**6.5.1** However, social norms do not require universal support in order to effectively police behaviour. For example, I have no desire to support a social

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<sup>47</sup> Prinz (2011) has argued that empathy should be regarded with caution in respect of motivating moral behaviour. However, Prinz makes his argument because he is concerned that empathy does not helpfully promote prosocial behaviour and so he would likely not accept empathy as a mechanism in the list in section four.

norm that requires small talk at family gatherings or a social norm that requires my choosing to attend the christening of a family member over attendance at an important football match. However, whatever my desires may actually be, my actions are still influenced by the prevailing norm. Thus, so long as most people continued to believe that prosocial behaviour was worth promoting and that antisocial behaviour was unacceptable then social norms based on these common desires would continue to be forceful – outliers would not be free of these norms just in virtue of these social norms losing any supposed moral backing. On this basis, it is fair to believe that social expectations could play a useful role in promoting prosocial behaviour, even amongst those outliers who do not desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour, in the context where morality has been abolished.

**6.6 *Modelled Behaviour and Past Experience:*** Without now labouring the point, any moral beliefs directing people to model prosocial behaviour and to encourage children to act prosocially would be replicated in the form of equally motivationally salient, non-moral, instrumental reasons if morality were to be abolished. There is, therefore, no reason to expect that the positive impact of this mechanism upon levels of prosocial behaviour would be reduced if moral practice were abolished.

## **7. Distinctly Moral Mechanisms**

**7.1** On the basis of section six it does not appear as if the preservation of moral practice post-vindication of MET would helpfully promote prosocial behaviour in virtue of strengthening the mechanisms originally identified in section five. However, the defender of MP might yet attempt to advance their cause by arguing that the list of mechanisms originally identified in section five is incomplete and ignores distinctly moral mechanisms that do affect the likelihood of an individual acting prosocially. If it is the case that there are further mechanisms, as yet undiscussed and dependent upon or made more powerful by the continuing existence of a moral practice, then preserving

morality may be required in order to better promote prosocial behaviour after all. Below, I consider two such plausibly distinctly moral mechanisms for promoting prosocial behaviour as suggested in the available literature.

**7.2** According to Oliner and Oliner (1988), as described by Piliavin and Charng (1990:31):

“[There were] very few personality differences between 231 gentiles who saved Jews in Nazi Europe and 126 nonrescuers matched on age, sex, education and geographic location during the war. Rescuers did have higher ethical values, beliefs in equity, greater pity or sympathy, and were more likely to see all people as equal.”

According to the research, what separated those prepared to act prosocially in a perilous situation in war torn Europe from those unprepared to risk their own safety for a prosocial end was not gender or level of education, for example, but rather higher ethical beliefs, greater sympathy and a belief in equality.

**7.2.1** I discuss the possible impact of ‘higher ethical beliefs’, however this might be understood, upon prosocial behaviour from 7.4 onwards. In addition, the discussion of empathy in the previous section is indicative of how characteristics and traits such as sympathy can be promoted without any necessary moral presence post-vindication of MET. Therefore, I next consider how the abolition of morality might impact a belief in equality, assuming that such a belief does impact the likelihood of a person acting prosocially.

**7.3** *Belief in Equality*: Fortunately for the defender of MA, there is little reason to expect that any belief in equality would be less likely to be held if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET. In section 7.7.1 of Chapter Five, when discussing the continuing power of Martin Luther King’s ‘dream speech’ even in the context where morality has been dispensed with, I made clear that a belief in equality can happily persist irrespective of it losing any moral backing. This is because it is correct, given MET, that no-one has any more moral or intrinsic value than any other person. In a very obvious sense, we are all of equal worth as a result of having no intrinsic or moral value; once morality is

dispensed with no-one could legitimately claim any *moral* superiority or inferiority for any person or group of people. Thus, if people are more likely to act in prosocial ways if they have a belief in equality then the abolition of morality is no threat to this belief or to this mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour.

**7.4 Higher Ethical Values:** In addition to the relevance of a belief in equality Piliavin and Charng (1990:31) also suggested that:

“Rescuers [of Jews in Nazi Europe] did have higher ethical values.”

This fits with Piliavin and Charng’s (1990:31) earlier comment that:

“[People] high in moral development appear to be more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour.”

If we read ‘high in moral development’ as meaning a person has developed ‘higher ethical values’ then the two suggestions interlink. However, it is not initially clear what it would be to have higher ethical values or to be high in moral development. I take there to be at least two ways of reading these claims – the first of which I focus on below and the second of which I focus on in section eight.

**7.4.1** One way of understanding what it is to have ‘higher ethical values’ is to understand the term as being applied to those individuals who happen to possess beliefs and characteristics that make their acting prosocially more likely. On this view, if an individual is empathetic, believes in equality between individuals, is concerned by the needs of others and acts (not for personal benefit) to benefit others, then that person may be said to have ‘higher ethical values’. A person who lacked these beliefs and characteristics would be said to have ‘lower ethical values’ in virtue of not acting for the benefit of others, believing in equality etc.

**7.4.2** Although this reading undercuts the view that the having of higher ethical values is an independent mechanism for the promotion of prosocial behaviour in its own right it is a plausible interpretation of the claim that

higher ethical values promote prosocial behaviour. Indeed, consider that Piliavin and Charng (1990:31), referring to Schwartz (1970), found that:

“...those with strong personal norms regarding bone marrow donation and high scores on attribution of responsibility to the self were significantly more likely to volunteer to join a marrow donor pool.”

It would be easy, for those not concerned by MET or MA, simply to label individuals with such strong personal norms and a willingness to volunteer as having higher ethical values, for the values and desires of such people direct towards prosocial behaviour.

**7.4.3** However, I have already made clear that such personal norms, as well as other prosocial promoting personal qualities, are not dependent upon morality and can be adequately promoted and supported through entirely non-moral means. Thus, if this is what it is to have ‘higher ethical values’ then this mechanism to promote prosocial behaviour persists even after the abolition of morality – even if it is both improperly named and not a unique prosocial promoting mechanism in its own right.

**7.5** However, the defender of MP is unlikely to be satisfied by this initial reading of ‘higher ethical values’. On the contrary, such a defender may seek consideration of the ‘higher ethical values’ as a proper and independent mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour. On this basis, in the next section I focus on a second reading of what it is for a person to have ‘higher ethical values’.

## **8. De Dicto Moral Desire**

**8.1** To understand the having of ‘higher ethical values’ as an independent mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour, consider a claim from Collett and Morrissey (2007:4):

“...people with prosocial moral reasoning...are more likely to be prosocial”



This quote suggests that those people who reason in a self-consciously moral way are more likely to act prosocially than those who rely on non-moral reasoning in order to justify and motivate prosocial behaviour. If this is correct, then it may be that those with 'higher ethical values' are those that rely on belief in moral prescriptions and directions in order to guide their behaviour. If self-consciously moral thoughts do help to promote prosocial behaviour, in addition to the mechanisms discussed in section five, then most people might yet have a reason to preserve moral practice post-vindication of MET.

**8.1.1** This suggestion would accord with the view of Joyce (2001:208-9) as discussed in Chapter Five. According to Joyce, one advantage of preserving morality is that we can preserve an "internalised sovereign" that provides individuals with what they take to be an "inescapable obligation" to perform certain types of behaviour. Such is the supposed potency of moral reasons that individuals would believe in given MP – reasons that are taken to be mind-independent and categorically prescriptive – that apparent recognition of a prosocial behaviour as being morally commanded may make it *more likely* that a person will act prosocially than if that prosocial behaviour lacked an intrinsic "to-be-doneness".

**8.2** The view that self-conscious moral reasoning makes prosocial behaviour more likely is thus based on the thought that the belief in apparent *moral rightness* of prosocial behaviour better motivates action than does the *mere recognition* that a particular behaviour would be prosocial. On this basis, in this section I consider the possible impact of a *de dicto* moral desire upon levels of prosocial behaviour.

**8.2.1** Dreier (2000:621-2) helpfully outlines the difference between a *de re* and a *de dicto* moral desire. Dreier focusses on an agent, Kalista, who desires to do what she believes is morally right. Dreier interprets her desire in two ways. According to the *de re* reading of her desire, she is:

“...motivated *non-derivatively* [or] *originally* by whatever features of actions makes them right.”

The individual who desires to act prosocially, in a way that they believe is also morally right, *because they are directly motivated by the needs of another person*, for example, can be said to have a *de re* moral desire; they desire to do what they believe to be morally right but only because they have a direct motivation to act in a way (prosocially) that they also believe possesses the property of being morally right. However, I have already argued that it is perfectly possible to motivate prosocial behaviour directly through entirely non-moral mechanisms and without any recourse to morality, thus citing *de re* moral desires adds nothing to the case of the MP supporter. Adding an apparently moral veneer to prosocial acting does not make those who would already desire to be prosocial actors more likely to act in prosocial ways.

**8.2.2** According to the *de dicto* reading of Kalista’s desire:

“Kalista is a good moral agent in virtue of her desiring to do whatever turns out to be the right thing to do. This desire is one she could have even if she has no idea what the right thing to do is, or if she is uncertain.”

*Given MET, no action is genuinely morally right.* However, if moral practice is preserved then belief that certain actions are morally right will persist post-vindication of MET. Therefore, if prosocial behaviour was believed to be morally right due to the shape of a preserved moral practice then Kalista would be motivated to act prosocially even in situations where she was not originally motivated by the prosocial nature of actions themselves. This might make a *de dicto* moral desire an extremely useful mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour for it might encourage such behaviour from those not positive in temperament, not concerned by social norms or not with a past history of prosocial acting, for example. For example, a desire to do what you believe to be morally right may motivate a donation to a local charity when you otherwise would not be motivated to give without this desire to act in accordance with your moral beliefs. Thus, the having of a *de dicto* moral

desire, preserved by MP, could make a positive difference to levels of prosocial behaviour and yet make MP more attractive in the context of this chapter.

**8.3** An example should make clearer the potential real world power of *de dicto* moral desires in respect of motivating actual prosocial behaviour that otherwise would not seem likely to occur. Consider the comparison between the behaviours of the Captains and crews of the French naval figure *Méduse* and HMS *Alceste*.

**8.3.1** The story of the *Méduse* was made famous in a painting by Géricault. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1816 the French frigate ran aground off of the coast of Mauritania. Unable to free the vessel from a sandbank the Captain gave the order to abandon ship on July 5<sup>th</sup>. However, this order was not good news for all because lifeboat capacity was nowhere near what was required to safely transport all 400 souls on board. As a result, while the Captain and fortunate others made for shore in relative safety, 146 men and 1 woman were forced to make for land on a hastily constructed raft. As those in the raft struggled with few resources and no means of power the lifeboats left them behind to drift in open water. Eventually, and by pure chance, a different ship came across the raft and offered sanctuary to those still living. The tale told by the survivors of the raft makes harrowing reading<sup>48</sup>:

“This whole night we contended against death, holding fast by the ropes which were strongly fastened. Rolled by the waves from the back to the front, and from the front to the back, and sometimes precipitated into the sea, suspended between life and death, lamenting our misfortune, certain to perish, yet still struggling for a fragment of existence with the cruel element which threatened to swallow us up.... About seven o'clock, in the morning, the sea fell a little, the wind blew with less fury; but what a sight presented itself to our view! Ten or twelve unhappy wretches, having their lower extremities entangled in the openings between the pieces of the raft, had not been able to disengage themselves, and had lost their lives; several others had been carried off by the violence of the sea.”

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11772/pg11772.html>

The situation did not improve with passage of time:

“Those whom death had spared in the disastrous night which we have just described, fell upon the dead bodies with which the raft was covered, and cut off pieces, which some instantly devoured.”

**8.3.2** While crew were abandoned to cannibalism and death when the *Méduse* ran into trouble, the situation was quite different when HMS *Alceste* was wrecked on a rock in the Java Sea on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1817 – one year after the wrecking of the *Méduse*. The *Alceste* also lacked sufficient lifeboat capacity to transport all of the souls on board, but rather than abandon some to their own fate Captain Maxwell maintained order and ferried all his crew to a nearby island through multiple rescue trips. Unfortunately, even on the island the crew were not yet safe as they faced attack from natives. At this point, Captain Maxwell gave a speech<sup>49</sup>:

“Stressing that union, steadiness and discipline were to be their salvation he announced that he had decided to attack and capture some proas to supplement his four boats and transport his crew to Java. His speech was received with three cheers and preparations started immediately.”

Fortunately for all, the arrival of a British vessel allowed the crew to be rescued prior to the launch of the attack. Across the whole incident there:

“...were only two casualties. One, a marine who had contracted jaundice in China, complained only that his enfeebled state prevented him joining his comrades to face the Malays. The other, a foreigner, decided to desert on the third day and was either captured by the Dyaks or bitten by a snake because he was never seen again.”

**8.3.3** If we take the stories as reported at face value, which I do at the risk of historical inaccuracy, then there is a very clear contrast between the behaviours of the two captains and the two crews. The relevance of such difference to this chapter is captured by the British response to the publication of tales of both ships. The British took the actions of the respective Captains and crews as evidence of their *moral superiority* as a

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.ageofnelson.org/MichaelPhillips/info.php?ref=0097>

culture. With this in mind we might posit the following motivational story explaining the differences in behaviour. Captain Maxwell of the *Alceste* acted prosocially because Captain Maxwell was specifically motivated to do the morally right thing – save his crew - as the result of his having a *de dicto* moral desire. As for the Captain of the *Méduse*, lacking such a *de dicto* moral desire, he was prepared only to save himself rather than risk his life for the sake of his crew even though he very likely recognised that saving his crew would be the prosocial course of action.<sup>50</sup>

**8.3.4** The example of the events that took place on HMS *Birkenhead* could also be used to make the same point.<sup>51</sup> The crew of that ship, perhaps motivated by *de dicto* moral desires, opted to stand on deck and ‘face their fate’ as the ship sank rather than swamping the lifeboats that they had filled with women and children. Again, without hanging my general case on the historical accuracy of the events as recorded, in a life and death situation it may have been a *de dicto* moral desire that motivated the sailors to allow themselves to perish in order that others should survive. Without such a desire, in such a time of peril, *and without the belief that saving others was morally right*, the crew of the *Birkenhead* may have scrambled and fled in an attempt to save their own lives.

**8.3.5** Of course, even if the *events* referred to above occurred as described my interpretations of the *motivations* of the individuals involved may be well wide of the mark. *However, the examples are for illustration only and should be read in that sense.* In this way, they do serve to make clear a suggested advantage of having *higher ethical values* if we wish to promote prosocial behaviour – where having higher ethical values means having a *de dicto* moral desire. This *de dicto* desire, preserved by MP post-vindication of MET, potentially makes prosocial behaviour more likely in general and especially

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<sup>50</sup> Of course, the Captain of the *Méduse* may have had a *de dicto* moral desire that motivated behaviour if he believed that saving his own life was the moral course of action. However, in so far as the content of this moral belief would lead to a non-prosocial act this reading brings to the light the possibility that moral beliefs may not reliably direct individuals to act in prosocial ways. I return to this issue in sections 8.5-7.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Women-Children-First/>

more likely in times of peril when individuals might be more inclined to act in non-prosocial ways to serve their own interests.

**8.3.6** However, there are two problems for the idea that the having of a *de dicto* moral desire would make prosocial behaviour more likely. Below, I outline objections due to ‘stipulative advantage’ and due to ‘unreliability’.

**8.4 Stipulative Advantage:** The suggestion made in discussion of the three examples above was that it was the presence of a *de dicto* moral desire – a general desire to do whatever is believed to be morally right – that separated the Captain of the *Alceste* and the crew of the *Birkenhead* from the Captain of the *Méduse*. However, there is a distinct lack of evidence to justify this type of general claim regarding the prosocial promoting benefits of a *de dicto* moral desire. In section five, I provided evidence in support of the fact that a positive temperament, empathy etc. actually do make a positive difference to the likelihood of an individual acting prosocially. This evidence makes a quite different interpretation of the cases provided quite plausible. Rather than a *de dicto* moral desire separating the Captains and crews, it might be suggested that the main difference between them was found in their temperaments, their levels of empathy, their confidence in their own self-efficacy due to their training etc. The French Captain, unsure that an attempt to save all would be successful and without the fear of being judged by comrades who were equally desperate to escape, perhaps opted to act in a non-prosocial way. On the other hand, Captain Maxwell, perhaps confident that he could affect the situation and positive of mind did opt to act prosocially. The important difference between the two was not, therefore, located in the presence or absence of a *de dicto* moral desire but in the effect of the non-moral mechanisms as discussed in section five. Recall that Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) specifically suggested that a positive temperament could provoke prosocial behaviour even when an individual was “distressed”, as the individuals in the examples given most certainly would have been.

**8.4.1** The key claim here is not, of course, related to the correct explanation of Captain Maxwell's prosocial behaviour etc. It is that explanations of prosocial behaviour in times of strife and peril that cite the mechanisms outlined in section five are empirically grounded whereas explanations that cite the impact of a *de dicto* moral desire are less so grounded. In the light of section six, it is not clear why we should believe that a *de dicto* moral desire makes prosocial behaviour *more likely* than it would be without such a desire so long as instrumental reasons to act prosocially are presented in compelling ways (as per section 7 of Chapter Five) and the mechanisms discussed in section six are properly manipulated and utilised. Individuals, such as Captain Maxwell may well have cited moral reasons in explaining his own behaviour in the Java Sea but it is not morality that we should accept as being the key driver behind his prosocial behaviour. Indeed, it is likely that both the French and British Captains desired to save their crews, and likely many non-rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe desired to be rescuers, but the difference between actors and non-actors can be plausibly explained without the need to invoke either a *de dicto* moral desire or any other morally relevant mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour. To put it counterfactually, if Captain Maxwell did not have a *de dicto* moral desire to act because morality had been abolished, but he was positive in temperament, confident, empathetic etc. then he would have *been just as likely to act as he did* – the preservation of morality does not maintain a uniquely positive tool for promoting prosocial behaviour.

**8.5 Unreliability:** In response to the objection due to stipulative advantage outlined above the defender of MP may refer back to the apparent evidence from Piliavin and Charng (1990:31) and Collett and Morrissey (2007:4) that suggested that higher ethical values/moral reasoning does help to promote prosocial behaviour. Of course, such evidence can be explained by reading the claim to higher ethical values in a non-substantive way in addition to the argument in the previous section that we should not expect a *de dicto* moral desire to have a positive and uniquely advantageous impact as a mechanism to promote prosocial behaviour. However, for those not yet convinced and in

order to show that MA has the advantage over MP in terms of the promotion of prosocial behaviour I now argue that the preservation of morality would be likely to *negatively* impact levels of prosocial behaviour based on the same types of thoughts offered in the previous chapter that justified the claim that the preservation of morality would undermine the promotion of safety as a personal and social good. This provides a reason to view the impact of morality negatively in the context of this chapter rather than as a fairly inconsequential aside.

**8.5.1** Specifically, the problems of moral unity and the morally backed disposition to interference, along with the possible impact of the moral hierarchy, should not be ignored in so far as they might affect levels of prosocial behaviour. I discuss these problems specifically below.

**8.6** *Non-Prosocial Interference*: The way in which the preservation of morality and of *de dicto* moral desires specifically can negatively impact levels of prosocial behaviour is made clearer by reference to examples.

**8.6.1** In 2014 the people of Scotland voted 'No' to independence from the rest of the United Kingdom in a national referendum. The battle between the 'Yes' and 'No' camps was fierce and enabled the Scottish Nationalists to build up a lot of support by the time of the 2015 General Election. During the campaign for that election, several SNP supporters mobbed the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Jim Murphy, as he campaigned on a Glasgow street. The SNP supporters forced Mr. Murphy to get in a car and retreat from the area.<sup>52</sup> However, the SNP are not alone in having some of their supporters abuse the politicians with whom they disagree. Leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party, Nigel Farage, was forced to leave a pub where he was having a family dinner as a result of the presence of angry protestors<sup>53</sup>, while UKIP MP Douglass Carswell had to be protected by police when confronted by

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3067268/Jim-Murphy-Eddie-Izzard-forced-flee-Labour-rally-Glasgow-angry-nationalists-spark-violent-scrum.html>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/22/farage-calls-anti-ukip-protesters-who-forced-him-out-of-pub-scrum>



a mob in central London, leaving the democratically elected MP frightened and shaken.<sup>54</sup>

**8.6.2** In these cases, at least some of the protestors abusing politicians on the streets were very likely motivated by the thought that they were morally justified, for according to a popular Labour party website for example<sup>55</sup>:

“UKIP’s policy is...morally wrong.”

This type of thought – where an opponent is characterised as being *morally wrong* rather than *merely wrong* – makes positively antisocial behaviour more likely. The prospect of your opponent winning an election is bad enough, but when that opponent is taken to be morally wrong then extra steps, beyond mere debating and normal campaigning, seem to be required in order to ensure their defeat.

**8.6.3** In addition, being motivated by moral beliefs and desires also seems to encourage antisocial behaviour outside of the context of politics. Recently, a group of Muslim men were jailed for harassing individuals whom they witnessed drinking alcohol, wearing clothing they deemed unacceptable or even holding hands in public. Likely believing these actions to be morally wrong, this vigilante group patrolled the streets in order to oppose them.<sup>56</sup>

**8.6.4** The key claim, highlighted by the examples, is that individuals are *more likely* to be motivated to antisocial behaviour if morality is preserved than if it is abolished. Those individuals who have a *de dicto* moral desire will be motivated to act in an antisocial way that they otherwise likely would not be – for it is hard to conceive of an instrumental reason that would appeal to most people to force a political leader out of a pub where he is having a family dinner etc. In addition, those individuals who do desire to act in the types of ways described above may find morality a very useful psychological device

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3099760/Ukip-MP-Douglas-Carswell-targeted-murderous-lynch-mob-anti-austerity-protesters-clash-police-outside-Parliament.html>

<sup>55</sup> <http://labourlist.org/2014/06/standing-up-to-the-ukip-threat/>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/06/muslim-vigilantes-jailed-sharia-law-attacks-london>

that allows them to act with a clearer conscience. If morality was abolished, then those who are annoyed and even angered by Nigel Farage and who might desire to shout at him even in front of his children would be more likely to recognise that there was no instrumental justification for such behaviour and likely would not act in such a way. They would be more likely to recognise that such behaviour does not promote prosocial behaviour and does not further any end beyond the immediate desire to annoy and irritate Mr. Farage. However, the presence of an apparent moral justification for such an action gives these individuals the justification that they seek in order to act upon their antisocial desires in this context – if something is morally prescribed then one is allowed, even compelled, to act in that way. Again, this discussion, although utilising actual examples, is at the level of generality and probability – preserving morality makes harmful intervention in the types of circumstances described *more likely* whereas abolishing morality makes harmful intervention in the types of circumstances described *less likely*. If morality was abolished, individuals would continue to have non-moral, instrumental reasons to protest against political opponents, but apart from in the most extreme settings would not take themselves to have motivationally efficacious reasons to abuse and threaten those politicians and others with whom they disagree on, for example, constitutional matters.

**8.6.5** In addition, as was discussed in 8.6 in Chapter Five, it is important to explain why there is no tension between the joint claims that moral belief is no more likely to motivate prosocial behaviour than non-moral belief but that moral belief is more likely to motivate antisocial behaviour than non-moral belief. This claim is not supported by a judgment that moral beliefs do not reliably motivate but by a judgment that moral beliefs motivate antisocial actions that most people would have instrumental reasons not to engage in. I have argued in both this and the previous chapter that where moral beliefs do direct individuals towards prosocial acting, belief in non-moral instrumentally grounded reasons would do the same for most people (and do so just as effectively given the ability to utilise emotion and rhetoric in framing such

reasons). However, a *de dicto* moral desire can motivate antisocial actions that would not be as likely to be suggested by purely non-moral beliefs (given that most people desire the promotion of prosocial behaviour).

**8.6.5.1** In addition, individuals who do have antisocial desires in any particular context can utilise moral thinking in order to justify those antisocial desires and thereby make acting upon those desires more likely. It is correct that, on occasion, people will have non-moral reasons to act antisocially – and that sometimes people will act on antisocial desires without any recourse to moral beliefs in the justification of such desires – but the preservation of moral practice post-vindication of MET makes instances of antisocial behaviour *more* likely because of the moral justification that can be afforded to antisocial acts. It is the difference in content of beliefs regarding how to act in different settings, rather than a difference in intrinsic motivational force, that explains why moral beliefs and desires are more likely to undermine the promotion of prosocial behaviour than purely non-moral beliefs and desires.

**8.7 Moral Hierarchy:** The case against MP is not complete without reference to the possible impact of the moral hierarchy upon levels of prosocial behaviour. Members of the Moral Hierarchy, as discussed in section nine of Chapter Five, could also utilise *de dicto* moral desires for antisocial ends. Current political leaders, for example, could make it morally impermissible to vote for opponents (as illustrated in 8.6) – leading to the types of antisocial behaviour suggested in 8.6.1. Other individuals in positions of moral power could also issue moral dictates in line with their own subjective tastes leading to the types of behaviour described in 8.6.2. In addition, yet other members of the moral hierarchy may scapegoat certain groups in society as being morally inferior and in need to punishment – such as the Jews in Nazi Germany – in order to advance their own ends. This could lead to the most dreadful of antisocial acts being motivated and apparently justified by *de dicto* moral desires.

**8.7.1** I will not labour discussion of the possible impact of the moral hierarchy here. It is correct that members of the moral hierarchy could also prescribe prosocial behaviours but, as I have argued, most people would already have a desire, and thereby an instrumental reason, to act in prosocial ways irrespective of any suggestion from the hierarchy given our natural disposition to altruism. In addition, they would be just as likely to act on these desires and reasons if the mechanisms as described in section five were utilised compared to the issuing of a prosocial behaviour favouring moral decree. It is clear, however, that examples of antisocial behaviour being morally directed are not difficult to find from history. A *de dicto* moral desire is apt to be abused by those in positions of moral power.

**8.8** On the basis of the above I hereby conclude that a *de dicto* moral desire is not a reliably useful mechanism for the promotion of prosocial behaviour and that, therefore, the having of a 'higher ethical values', where this is understood as an independent mechanism for promoting prosocial behaviour, does not actually make prosocial behaviour more likely. Further, I conclude that *de dicto* moral desires will also motivate antisocial behaviours that would be less likely to occur if moral practice was abolished. Given the inability, post-vindication of MET, to preserve only moral prescriptions in favour of prosocial acting it seems clear that prosocial behaviour is better promoted by the abolition of moral practice.

## **9. Conclusion**

**9.1** At the outset of this chapter I made clear to a sufficiently precise (but not perfectly precise) degree how the concept of prosocial behaviour should be understood. I then justified the claim that most people would highly value the promotion of prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good via reference to both the ways in which prosocial behaviour can facilitate the securing of an individual's personally desired ends and via reference to human beings' natural altruism.

**9.2** Specifically, I presented evidence suggesting that human beings are naturally disposed to the having of altruistic desires and that therefore there can be no suggestion that common desires for the promotion of safety and prosocial behaviour as personal and social goods is predicated upon the presence of a moral practice.

**9.3** Following this, I made clear the key mechanisms that can increase or decrease the likelihood of individuals acting on their prosocial desires. I argued that the preservation of morality is irrelevant to the manipulation of these mechanisms.

**9.4** In response to the suggestion that the preservation of a *de dicto* moral desire would aid promotion of prosocial behaviour, perhaps especially in times of peril, I argued that there is no positive reason to suppose that this desire, preserved after MET, would better promote prosocial behaviour compared to desires and reasons grounded in instrumental, non-moral foundations. On the contrary, by preserving moral thinking and *de dicto* moral desires I suggested that we would make antisocial behaviour more likely as a result of the impact of both the moral disposition to interference and the moral hierarchy.

**9.5** Thus, I conclude that the abolition of morality would better and more reliably promote prosocial behaviour as a personal and social good than would the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET. In the next chapter, I argue that the abolition of morality would also better promote productive conflict resolution – a third key personal and social good.

# **Chapter Seven: Promoting Productive Conflict Resolution as a Personal and Social Good**

## **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In Chapters Five and Six I argued that the abolition rather than the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET would better promote the personal and social goods of safety and prosocial behaviour. In this chapter, I argue that in addition to these successes, the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET would also better promote productive conflict resolution compared to the preservation of morality.

**1.2** I first make clear how to understand the concept of *productive* conflict resolution and outline reasons for believing that most people would strongly desire the promotion of this type of conflict resolution.

**1.3** Next, I outline and respond to views suggesting that moral thought and moral talk would be useful in terms of promoting productive conflict resolutions. Without labouring over arguments previously provided in the previous two chapters, I respond to these claims and undercut the idea that MP has any particular advantage over MA in this setting.

**1.4** In making the case that MA would better promote productive conflict resolution, I first outline the key mechanisms affecting the likelihood of conflicts being resolved productively. I then offer three related arguments highlighting the costs of MP in relation to these productive conflict resolution enhancing mechanisms.

**1.5** I conclude that if, as most people do, you desire the promotion of productive conflict resolution then you have a (defeasible) instrumental reason to favour Moral Abolitionism (MA), rather than MP, post-vindication of MET.

## **2. Productive Conflict Resolution Qua Generally Desirable**

### **Good**

**2.1** It is crucial at the outset of this chapter to both make clear the concept of *productive* conflict resolution and to explain why this is a personal and social good that most people would strongly desire the promotion of, at least in most circumstances.

**2.2** I offer a stipulative definition of ‘productive conflict resolution’ in this chapter. As such, I am at liberty to define productive conflict resolution in such a way so as to make it extremely plausible that most people would strongly desire increasing instances of conflict resolutions of this type. If the concept is defined in a way that makes it typically desirable to most people, then it will be an important advantage for the practice, MA or MP, which better promotes this desirable good post-vindication of MET.

**2.3** In order to make the concept of productive resolution clearer, first consider the multitude of ways in which conflicts can be resolved.

**2.3.1** A conflict between two individuals in a nightclub regarding who will get to order at the bar first could be resolved if one individual shoves the other individual to the floor.

**2.3.2** A conflict between a husband and wife regarding whether or not the wife should accept a new job could be resolved if the husband spreads malicious rumours about his wife in order to ensure that she does not receive a job offer from her would be employers.

**2.3.3** A conflict between two neighbouring nations over the correct specification of a trade deal could be resolved if one nation invaded the other and took possession of their resources for themselves.

**2.4** However, I suggest that most people would agree that the conflict resolutions as described above are not *prima facie* desirable. What seems to make these example conflict resolutions undesirable is that they are resolved

in ways that are either purely based on physical strength, purely based on greed and selfishness or that they fail to adequately promote and satisfy the desires and interests of both sides in the conflict (I return to this point in 2.5 and beyond). Whether it is the man at the bar, the wife seeking new employment or the invaded nation, the desires of the 'losing sides' were not in any way satisfied in the resolutions of the conflicts as stated.

**2.4.1** In opposition to these conflict resolutions, I take it that a productive conflict resolution, *qua generally desirable conflict resolution*, would at least take account of the desires of both sides in a conflict (at least in most circumstances). This is because:

(1) Most people typically wish their own desires to be satisfied

(2) Most people are disposed to positive, fundamentally other-directed desires

(1) is, I assume, an independently plausible claim – though I clearly do not take it to be absolutely true in all circumstances that people wish their desires to be satisfied; generality is sufficient for my purposes here. (2) is justified by section four of Chapter Six, wherein I argued that most people are naturally disposed to altruism. On the basis of these two premises, we can conclude that most individuals typically desire both that their own desires and interests are promoted and that the desires and interests of others are generally promoted. These factors are clearly relevant to the shape and structure of a generally desirable form of conflict resolution. Thus, I argue what makes the conflict resolutions described in 2.3 unattractive is, at least in part, that these conflict resolutions failed to satisfy the desires and interests of both parties relevant to the conflict as far as was possible.

**2.5** The above provides grounding for a definition of productive conflict resolution *qua* type of conflict resolution that most people would take to be desirable, in most circumstances. Given the common desire for both our own



desires and the desires of others to be promoted, I suggest the following as an initial characterisation of productive conflict resolution:

*(1) A resolution to a conflict is productive if and only if that resolution maximises desire satisfaction [of desires relevant to the conflict] for all parties affected by the conflict, as far as possible*

**2.5.1** In examining the merit of this definition of productive conflict resolution, it is initially important to make clear the justification for at least two distinct aspects of the definition as stated – the ‘as far as possible’ condition and the focus on ‘desire satisfaction’. Below, I discuss the basis for each in turn.

**2.5.2** The ‘as far as possible’ condition is important because some conflicts are zero-sum games. This is to say that some conflicts are structured in such a way that only one side can have their desires fulfilled. For example, if one combatant desires to watch a live football match at 3pm while another combatant desires to watch a live ballet at the same time – and both combatants only wish to attend if they are accompanied by the other – then it is not possible that both of these people could have their immediate desires satisfied in any possible resolution to the conflict (although related desires may be satisfied after a period of negotiation). Thus, a productive conflict resolution need only maximise desire satisfaction for relevant parties ‘as far as possible’ – a resolution is not automatically unproductive just in virtue of not being able to maximally satisfy all parties relevant to a conflict.

**2.5.3** The definition of productive conflict resolution as stated is also focussed on *desire satisfaction* rather than the *respecting* or *taking account* of competing desires in a conflict resolution. The difference between these notions is akin to the difference between focussing on *outcomes* and focussing on *procedures* when studying conflict resolution. These two notions will often neatly accord – for a productive outcome to a conflict will usually be based on the respecting of different desires amongst different parties to the

conflict – but this need not be the case. The following example makes this possibility clearer.

**2.5.4** James and Ralph are in a conflict regarding who will take the final seat on a busy train as they both embark on a long journey. The most productive resolution to their conflict, in terms of desire satisfaction, would be if both individuals opted to share the seat for different periods of the journey – this would maximise desire satisfaction for both individuals *as far as possible* in this particular context assuming that both Ralph and James desire to be seated. However, the two individuals may instead opt to flip a fair coin in order to decide who gets to sit down for the whole journey and who must stand for the whole journey. This form of conflict resolution *respects* and *takes account* of the desires of both parties for it gives both individuals an equal chance of having their desires satisfied and it may be considered as being ‘procedurally fair’ for doing so. However, I suggest that in this context coin-flipping in the way described would not help to productively resolve the conflict because two hours into the train journey one individual will be napping comfortably while the other individual will be sitting on the floor outside the toilet at the end of the carriage without the prospect of this burden being relieved in the near future. This resolution to the conflict may have respected the desires of the two parties involved by giving them an equal chance of being satisfied but it does not seem to be a desirable form of conflict resolution in this setting when the seat could have easily been shared. Thus, in this chapter, I define a productive conflict resolution in terms of ‘outcomes of conflict resolutions’ rather than ‘processes for conflict resolution’.

**2.5.5** Definition (1) in 2.5 also seems to capture what is unproductive about the conflict resolutions detailed in 2.3. In those conflicts desire satisfaction for both sides in the conflict was not maximised as far as possible; indeed, in all three cases the relevant desires of one party were not satisfied at all in the conflict resolutions as described. It should be noted, however, that unproductive conflict resolutions are far easier to describe and provide

examples of than productive conflict resolutions. In the real world, the conditions under which a conflict could be resolved productively are often difficult to describe – understanding *how* to resolve a conflict productively is perhaps more difficult than actually putting that resolution into practice once identified in many different settings.

**2.6** Despite initial plausibility, definition (1) of productive conflict resolution requires refinement in order to properly capture a type of conflict resolution that most people would take to be generally desirable. The following example makes clearer why this is the case.

**2.6.1** Two political parties are engaged in a conflict regarding the treatment of a minority racial group in their society. Members of one political party seek to ensure that members of this minority racial group are treated as legal citizens, with all the protections and help that such a status affords. However, the members of the other political party seek to end the lives of the members of the minority racial group in a fashion similar to Nazi treatment of Jews in 1930's and 1940's Europe.

**2.6.2** If, for the sake of argument, we ignore desires of both the members of the minority racial group themselves, as well as other individuals in society relevant to this conflict, it would not seem to be a desirable conflict resolution if the desires of the members of the racist political party were maximised as far as possible. On the contrary, a conflict resolution that did not satisfy any of the relevant desires of the racist political party in this setting would seem to be desirable for most people. This is because satisfying the desires of the members of the racist political party would require a type of safety-relevant harming that, as per section five of Chapter Five, most people do not generally desire.<sup>57</sup> Thus, definition (1) of productive conflict resolution requires refinement if it is to properly capture a type of conflict resolution that most people desire promotion of.

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<sup>57</sup> The concept of a safety-relevant harm is discussed in section four of Chapter Five

**2.7** Given the previous example, a desirable form of conflict resolution would seem to be a form of conflict resolution that satisfied the desires of different parties in a conflict unless one of the parties wanted to actively harm others (or otherwise act maliciously). In order to ensure that a productive conflict resolution does not require satisfying, as far as possible, particularly harmful or abhorrent desires a further condition can be added as below:

(2) A resolution to a conflict is productive if and only if that resolution maximises desire satisfaction [of desires relevant to the conflict] for parties affected by the conflict, as far as possible, *so long as those desires do not require safety-relevant harms in order to be satisfied*

According to this second definition of what it is for a conflict resolution to be productive, the desires of the members of the racist political party would no longer need to be maximised as far as possible in order for the conflict to be productively resolved. This is because their desires would require harming on a great scale. Given that, as per section five in Chapter Five, most people strongly desire the promotion of safety it seems that this reformed definition of productive conflict resolution captures a type of conflict resolution that most people would desire to be promoted.

**2.7.1** However, once again, I believe that the above definition of productive conflict resolution should be revised in order to properly capture a generally desirable form of conflict resolution. This is because just as definition (1) of productive conflict resolution from 2.5 allowed undesirable conflict resolutions to count as being productive, so definition (2) of productive conflict resolution from 2.6 does not allow conflict resolutions that would be desirable to most people to count as being productive. The following example makes clear why this is the case.

**2.7.2** In the mid 1940's the leadership of the United States was faced with a very difficult choice regarding the most appropriate way of ending the conflict of World War Two within the context of fighting against Japan in the Far East.

Putting historical accuracy to one side, we can assume that there were three options in respect of resolving the ongoing conflict:

- (1) Surrender in order to end the fighting
- (2) Continue a ground offensive that would be very bloody and lengthy
- (3) Use an atomic bomb to destroy the Japanese will to continue fighting

As history reveals, the United States leadership opted for option three.

**2.7.3** Assume, once more for the sake of argument, that by dropping the A-bomb the United States shortened the war and reduced loss of life by a great deal overall. Thus, less harm actually occurred than otherwise would have done if either of the other options had been chosen (surrender, let us assume, would have led to prolonged harming of different groups over decades). If the situation were as stated, and *given all of the available options*, the dropping of the A-bomb was the least harmful course of action and the course of action that best promoted safety. In this extreme circumstance, I suggest that most people would – perhaps with an exceedingly heavy heart – grant that this was the most desirable form of conflict resolution among the practical and feasible options.<sup>58</sup>

**2.7.4** Given that the above type of conflict resolution would be desirable to most people in the particular circumstances as described, it is important that it is captured by my definition of a productive conflict resolution. At present, based on definition (2) from 2.6 it would not count as a productive conflict resolution because it requires safety-relevant harming and thus would fall foul of the additional condition added in definition (2). Thus, I offer a further revised definition below:

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<sup>58</sup> If the example provided is unappealing because of real-world beliefs or issues surrounding an A-bomb in particular, this should not distract from the thought that sometimes harmful conflict resolutions can be desirable as they are the ‘best available’ in a very clear sense. It is this *type* of conflict resolution that matters to this section, not the accuracy of the example as described.

(3) A resolution to a conflict is productive if and only if that resolution maximises desire satisfaction [of desires relevant to the conflict] for all parties affected by the conflict, as far as possible, *and ensures that safety-relevant harms are minimised as far as possible.*

Thus, the 'safety-condition' added in definition (2) is no longer absolute; in definition (3) it is allowed that harmful behaviour can be part of a productive conflict resolution so long as safety-relevant harms are minimised as far as possible. Again, this 'as far as possible' qualification is applied in order to ensure that the definition is broad enough to cover situations where harms can only be minimised to a small degree, such as the example in 2.7.3. Circumstances dictate what is and is not possible in any particular conflict setting and the definition of productive conflict resolution should be broad enough to respect this.

**2.7.5** Definition (3) is the definition of productive conflict resolution that I proceed with in this chapter. In the rest of this chapter I outline the impact of MA and MP upon this type of conflict resolution in order to ascertain which practice gains an advantage post-vindication of MET in respect of better promoting a good that most people desire the promotion of.

**2.8** Prior to moving on, however, it is worth briefly responding to a possible epistemic objection to my definition of productive conflict resolution. Specifically, my definition of productive conflict resolution may suffer from the same apparent flaw that befalls certain conditions of 'Just War Theory'. According to most formulations of Just War Theory (Toner 2010:91) a war can only be justly declared if it is declared as a *last resort*. However, in practice, it is very difficult to assess whether or not a war was declared as a last resort because it is hard to assess whether or not all war-avoiding tactics have been fully and completely exhausted; it always seems possible that one more desperate negotiating phone call could be made or that one more hour could be waited before the declaration of war and the opening of hostilities.

**2.8.1** Just as it might be that, in practice, we cannot know if war was declared as a truly last resort and so we cannot ascertain whether or not the war was just, so it might be that in practice we cannot know if desires have been maximised as far as possible, or whether safety-relevant harms have been mitigated as far as possible, and so we cannot ascertain if actual conflict resolutions are productive or not.

**2.8.2** However, I am satisfied to leave the definition of productive conflict resolution as put forward by (3) in 2.7.4. This is because I do not view any vagueness in the definition of productive conflict resolution as particularly damaging to the theoretical discussion in this chapter. In this setting, I do not seek to ascertain whether or not particular historical conflict resolutions have been productive, or whether particular future conflict resolutions might be productive. Rather, I am interested in – at a theoretical level – which practice makes productive conflict resolution more likely. So long as the core concept of productive conflict resolution is clear, and it is the case that the concept is desirable to most people, then any epistemic issue in terms of real-world application of the concept is beyond the scope of this chapter. I do not seek to provide a ‘decision theory’ or a guide for engaging in specific real world productive conflict resolutions. I do, however, grant that there may be great difficulty in applying the concept of productive conflict resolution in concrete and often messy real-world contexts.

**2.9** Having made clear how to understand productive conflict resolution, and the basis of its general desirability for most people, in the next section I outline possible reasons for believing that the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET would more effectively promote instances of productive conflict resolution than would the abolition of morality. From here, when I refer to productive conflict resolution I have in mind the concept as defined by (3) in 2.7.4 unless stated otherwise.

### **3. Supposed MP Benefits**

**3.1** The view that moral belief and moral discourse are useful tools for promoting productive conflict resolutions has not been especially uncommon, as I outline later in this section. However, previous writings on the subject have, obviously, not been framed in terms of the stipulative definition of productive conflict resolution that I offered in the previous section. Despite this, although the authors cited below do not refer directly to my concept of productive conflict resolution, I do take it to be fair to read their comments as suggesting that morality is helpful in respect of making *desirable* conflict resolutions more likely. Given this, and given the basis of my definition of productive conflict resolution in terms of ‘desirability to most people’, I am not concerned by placing the language of productive conflict resolution at the centre of the discussion of the views that follow.

**3.2** According to Nolan, Restall and West (2005) it would be folly to abolish moral thinking and moral discourse at least in part because they are helpful in respect of securing productive conflict resolutions. They state (2005:312):

“The institution of realist morality has taught us to discuss the resolutions of such matters [conflicts] in terms of rights, duties, and obligations”

Abolition of realist moral talk and thought would be unhelpful specifically in this context because it:

“...would deprive us of many of the procedures and tacit understandings that provide a well-established framework within which such discussions [regarding interpersonal conflict] take place.”

**3.2.1** Nolan, Restall and West highlight the possible benefits of a commonly understood moral framework – a well understood framework through which different individuals can be guided and can confer with each other on how they are morally obliged to act, whose moral rights they should respect and what their moral duty might be. Thus, if morality is preserved post-vindication of MET a person might come to believe that they are *morally obliged* to



maximise competing desires as far as possible in a conflict resolution without also unduly increasing levels of safety-relevant harm. Indeed, other moral beliefs, regarding a person's moral rights for example, might also seem to be helpful in respect of directing and motivating individuals to seek productive resolutions to conflicts – a person may believe that they are morally obliged to uphold the moral right of another person to have their interests satisfied as far as possible in a conflict resolution. This type of moral belief, it might be suggested, makes productive conflict resolution more likely to occur.

**3.3** Moral beliefs might be especially useful in terms of promoting productive conflict resolutions for a reason outlined by French and Allbright (1998). According to them (1998:181):

“An emphasis on consensus and working towards a just and lasting resolution of conflict is the focus of morality in views ranging from Plato to Baier.”

Moral beliefs might reliably direct behaviour that makes productive conflict resolution more likely because resolving conflicts in a just and lasting way (a 'productive' way, I suggest) is at the heart of the majority of normative moral theories.

**3.3.1** As evidence of this, consider what Boyle (1994:199) says regarding the normative prescriptions of Natural Law ethics as just one example:

“...among its prescriptions are norms requiring tolerance, cooperation and efforts to reach mutual understanding.”

If this type of guidance is replicated across different normative moral theories then it may turn out that moral beliefs do reliably aid the promotion of productive conflict resolutions by encouraging individuals to believe in compelling moral reasons to secure productive conflict resolutions. In itself, this possibility does not seem to be implausible, for a normative moral system such as Virtue Ethics may direct the cultivation of virtuous character traits that makes productive conflict resolution more likely, while a Consequentialist

normative system may suggest that the 'good' is only maximised if conflicts are resolved productively.

**3.3.2** Indeed, evidence from the real world may back up the idea that moral beliefs and traditional moral theories do have a positive impact upon the likelihood of productive conflict resolution. Rwantabagu (2010) cites a decline in belief in traditional moral values – likely the types of values that French and Allbright (1998:181) had in mind in 3.3 – as a contributing factor in the ongoing existence of conflict in Burundi. Rwantabagu (2010:345) says:

“Within the African context, the post-colonial states, including Burundi, have been characterised by intra-national crisis and inter-ethnic conflict...it is commonly believed that the gradual loss of peace-enhancing moral values has been a major contributing factor.”

Rwantabagu (2010:346) continues:

“...this article argues that the deep inter-communal clashes and divisions Burundi has undergone are due to a crisis in moral values and the collapse of traditional values in society.”

Ceasing to hold moral beliefs that direct individuals towards, amongst other things, resolving conflicts productively may lead to the type of depressing situation that Rwantabagu associates with Burundi. Thus, in order to make productive conflict resolution more likely, moral beliefs may be an important asset to have on side and to utilise as an extremely helpful mechanism.

**3.3.3** In addition, in the context of Stem Cell Research (SCR), Master and Crozier (2012) attempt to utilise moral beliefs in order to motivate a productive conflict resolution between opposing sides. Master and Crozier (2012:50) describe the conflict thusly:

“In the US, stem cell research is at a moral impasse—many see this research as ethically mandated due to its potential for ameliorating major diseases, while others see this research as ethically impermissible because it typically involves the destruction of embryos and use of ova from women.”

In order to productively resolve the conflict between the two sides of this debate, Master and Crozier (2012:51) suggest that:

“...a ‘moral compromise’ in SCR - in both outcome and process - is an objective that is morally worthy and can preserve personal integrity. A moral compromise requires all parties to acknowledge the limitations of their values and reciprocally concede desired outcomes by accommodating some of the values and desires of opposing parties. We sketch a possible moral compromise for SCR and describe how it can be applied to current US policy and funding for SCR.”

In suggesting a ‘moral compromise’, Master and Crozier highlight the importance of both outcome and process in resolving a conflict, whereas my definition of a productive conflict resolution is focussed only outcomes as per 2.5.3. However, according to their view moral thinking is a tool that can be utilised in order to secure productive conflict resolutions as I have defined them because moral beliefs can motivate compromise and the related satisfying of desires across differing sides in a conflict. Thus, in this context as well as the others previously suggested, moral thinking seems to be capable of directing individuals to act in ways that make productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur.

#### **4. Response to Supposed MP Benefits**

**4.1** In response to the supposed benefits associated with MP as outlined in section three, I seek not to unduly labour through types of responses that have been already outlined in both Chapter Five and Chapter Six in respect of challenging supposed MP benefits. However, the same types of response are powerful in this context as in previous contexts and their relevance cannot be ignored. Below, I summarise the grounds for believing that moral talk and moral thought are not *more likely* to promote instances of productive conflict resolution than non-moral talk and non-moral thought grounded by instrumental reasons, based on both the normative direction of instrumental reasons and on the motivational power of instrumentally grounded beliefs.

**4.2 Instrumental Reasons:** In section two, I affirmed the fact that most people would desire the promotion of productive conflict resolution in virtue of most people's natural disposition to altruism, most people's desire for the promotion of safety and the associated reduction of safety-relevant harms and most people's general desire to have their own desires satisfied. It seems to follow, given this, that most people would have non-moral instrumental reasons to act in ways that make productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur in the majority of circumstances.

**4.2.1** Thus, non-moral instrumental reasons should mirror the normative directives emanating from normative moral theories in respect of guiding individuals to act in productive conflict resolution promoting ways in most circumstances. I do not, therefore, need to argue here against either French and Allbright's (1998) general contention suggesting that moral beliefs might typically direct individuals to act to bring about productive conflict resolutions, or Boyle's (1994) contention that Natural Law ethics prescribes actions to secure productive conflict resolutions, in order to show that most people would continue to have reasons to promote productive conflict resolutions even if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET. As in the previous two chapters, broadly speaking any helpful belief in moral reasons will be mirrored in this context (in content, rather than form) by belief in non-moral, instrumental reasons.

**4.2.2** It is worth explicitly stating that this response runs counter to what Boyle (1994:191) suggests will be the case if morality is abolished:

“...what is objectionable in moral nihilism appears to be that it settles controversies by force, and that is bad or at least undesirable”

If by moral nihilism Boyle means nothing more than the abolition of morality then he is mistaken in suggesting that, post-abolition of morality, force would be the only means of settling controversies or conflicts. On the contrary, most people will have instrumental reasons to act in ways that make productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur, where this entails controlling levels

of safety-relevant harms as far as possible in any given context. It may not be *right over might* once morality is abolished, but somewhat less pithily it may be *instrumental reason over physical strength* in terms of settling conflicts.

**4.2.3** The following objection, hinted at by Hinckfuss (1987:4.1), does not therefore carry much weight:

“It is true that there could be, or indeed actually are, many cases when an invocation of moral attitudes is conducive to maximal satisfaction”

I do not deny that moral beliefs may sometimes guide individuals to resolving a conflict productively – they may do so in a non-trivial number of circumstances given the suggestions in section three. However, this fact alone does not give MP an advantage over MA for non-moral, instrumental reasons will also guide individuals to resolve conflicts productively given most people’s desires and the definition of productive conflict resolution provided in section two of this chapter.

**4.3** However, the discussion above may be considered to be overly abstract and so I offer an example below of just how instrumental reasons might help to facilitate a productive conflict resolution even when the conflict seems to be both acute and grounded in deep value differences.

**4.3.1** There is a serious conflict between those who seek to protect the native rhino population in parts of Africa and those who seek to kill such animals in order to make a financial gain – likely by selling rhino horn into the Chinese market or the Asian market more broadly.<sup>59</sup> This may seem to be an unlikely setting for an example of how a productive conflict resolution could be brought about by the utilisation only of instrumental reasoning because the desires of the opposing sides seem to be so at odds. However, if it is recognised that poachers are only poachers because of a desire for financial gain, rather than because of a fundamental desire to kill animals, then individuals seeking the protection of animals can recognise that their desire is

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<sup>59</sup>[http://wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/endangered\\_species/rhinoceros/african\\_rhinos/poaching\\_crisis\\_african\\_rhinos/](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/rhinoceros/african_rhinos/poaching_crisis_african_rhinos/) and

more likely to be satisfied if poachers are financially supported for behaviour that helps rather than hurts local animal populations; poachers are less likely to poach if they can be paid as gamekeepers, for example.<sup>60,61</sup> Even if individuals are tempted to punish or harm opponents in this conflict setting, instrumental reasons can direct those individuals towards a productive conflict resolution based on the suggestion above. In addition, given that most people have a natural disposition to altruism as per section four of Chapter Six, most people will also have an instrumental reason to work with other individuals – even poachers – to help them to secure their non-harmful desires; in this setting this means working to ensure that rhino poachers can earn another type of living rather than merely ignoring their desires in attempts to stop their killing. Based on the above, moral thinking is not required in this circumstance in order to bring a productive conflict resolution about.<sup>62</sup>

**4.4 Motivations and Weakness of Will:** It is also worth reiterating, as per arguments in section seven of Chapter Five, that there is little reason to believe that moral beliefs directing individuals to bring about productive conflict resolutions would have a greater motivational impact than non-moral beliefs also directing individuals to bring about productive conflict resolutions. Joyce (2001:181) may suggest that moral beliefs are imbued with a “must-be-doneness” but, as argued in Chapter Five, instrumental reasons that are properly framed in rhetorically powerful and emotionally resonating ways can

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/nov/22/zimbabwe-safari-poachers-turned-gamekeepers>

<sup>61</sup> This example is illustrative only, for the evidence is that not all poachers are motivated by financial necessity. Regardless, people will continue to have non-moral, instrumental reasons to engage with poachers in order to secure a productive conflict resolution. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/africa-wild/2013/jul/09/guns-war-elephant-poachers>

<sup>62</sup> The example of Charlie Hamilton James could also be offered here. James bought a section of rainforest in a National Park in Peru in order to stop loggers bringing illegally logged trees out of the forest. However, upon discovering a logger who was continuing to use his land illegally in order to support his family, James employed the man to protect his land – thereby ending his need to log in order to put food on the table of his family. James, in my terms, recognised an instrumental reason to work with his opponent in a conflict in order to productively resolve that conflict and he did not need to fall back on moral thinking in order to bring such a productive conflict resolution about. Details: <http://www.digitalrainforest.co.uk/>

be at least as motivationally efficacious as beliefs regarding moral reasons for action.

**4.5** On the basis of this section, based as it is on types of responses already discussed in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six, I suggest that there is little reason to grant that moral talk and moral thought would be *more advantageous*, post-vindication of MET, than non-moral thought and non-moral talk in respect of bringing about increases in instances of productive conflict resolution. As was the case with the personal and social goods of safety and prosocial behaviour, the abolition of morality would not unduly limit the promotion of productive conflict resolution post-vindication of MET.

## **5. Mechanisms for Promoting Productive Conflict Resolution**

**5.1** If, as suggested in section four, moral thinking and moral talking do not make a special contribution to the promotion of productive conflict resolution versus non-moral thinking and non-moral talking, then it is important to make clear which factors do actually make productive conflict resolution more likely to occur. In this section, I argue that prosocial behaviour and prosocial behaviour promoting characteristics are crucial in respect of making productive conflict resolutions more likely.

**5.2** The following examples make clearer the plausible positive correlation between levels of prosocial behaviour and levels of productively resolved conflicts.

**5.2.1** A (former) couple are engaged in a conflict as they seek to secure a divorce settlement. A productive conflict resolution would seem to be more likely in this setting if the two parties *cooperate, empathise* and seek to *understand* each other's perspectives. If they do not act prosocially by acting compassionately or helpfully towards each other, then an unproductive conflict resolution would seem to be more likely to occur where fewer desires are satisfied on either side as legal bills and stress levels increase.

**5.2.2** Two political parties, who both desire to make ordinary people financially more prosperous, are in conflict over whether or not to vote for a reduction in the top rate of income tax. Assuming that a reduction in the top rate of income tax would lead to an increase in the overall tax take and would thereby allow for an increase in public spending on the poorest in society, a productive conflict resolution in this setting would seem to be more likely if the members of the two political parties *constructively engaged* with each other, *cooperated* in pursuit of their common goal and *understood* each other's perspectives – by sharing information and supporting each other their conflict could be resolved in a way that satisfies their joint desire. However, if the parties do not cooperate and instead actively pursue actions that damage their opponent rather than focussing on securing their primary goal, then a productive conflict resolution would be less likely. Suggesting, for example, that any proposed tax cut is motivated only by the Prime Minister's desire to please those few rich individuals on his Christmas card list may be politically expedient in the short-term but it is not likely to aid the securing of a productive conflict resolution in the longer term; animosity between political opponents will make it less likely that they will pool thinking, ideas and votes for the conflict resolution that would maximise the satisfaction of their desires in this context.<sup>63</sup>

**5.3** These examples support the more general claim that prosocial behaviour makes productive conflict resolution more likely. The connection is conceptually, as well as anecdotally, clear – individuals who cooperate, help, are understanding and empathetic, support and respect each other (rather than being angry, self-interested and unwilling to take the perspective of the other) are more likely to resolve conflicts productively. As Hinckfuss (1987:4.4) puts it:

“Competitive resolution of conflicts results in at most one winner. Cooperative resolution of conflicts usually results in everybody being satisfied.”

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<sup>63</sup> <http://archive.labour.org.uk/unfair-budget-from-same-old-tories>



Gaertner (2011:246) also suggests that *reconciliation* has become a dominant model for conflict resolution at a national level. If we seek to productively resolve conflicts then prosocial behaviour seems to be the most crucial mechanism to be utilised.

**5.4** However, if the most important and powerful way of promoting productive conflict resolution is to promote prosocial behaviour then the conclusion of the last chapter may seem to entail the conclusion of this chapter. The following seemingly valid argument makes this possibility clearer:

1. Promoting prosocial behaviour is a key mechanism in terms of making productive conflict resolution more likely to occur.
2. MA better promotes prosocial behaviour than does MP post-vindication of MET (given Chapter Six).

Therefore,

C. MA makes productive conflict resolution more likely to occur post-vindication of MET than does MP.

**5.4.1** The argument above suggests that the conclusion of this chapter should be clear from this point – if prosocial behaviour is central to promoting productive conflict resolutions then, assuming the conclusion from the previous chapter, MA will better promote productive conflict resolutions than MP.

**5.4.2** The conclusion that MA would better promote productive conflict resolutions than would MP, post-vindication of MET, is the conclusion that I support in this chapter. However, despite the argument in 5.4, there is merit in further considering specific costs associated with the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET within the context of the discussion in this chapter. This is because there are specific costs associated with morality within the context of productive conflict resolution that it is worthwhile discussing in order to highlight the clear advantage of MA in this setting. This

discussion of specific costs will buttress the final conclusion in this chapter in favour of MA. In the next sections, I highlight three related costs associated with the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET.

## **6. Distinctly Moral Problems**

**6.1** Specifically, in the next three sections, I outline the problems of *moral distraction*, *moral approbation* and *the moral hierarchy* as they apply to MP in the context of productive conflict resolution. I thus argue on the same lines as Hinckfuss (1987:4.2) when he makes clear why it is not enough for the defender of MP merely to point to the circumstances in which the preservation of morality may help to facilitate instances of productive conflict resolution:

“The question is whether the institution [of morality] is worth preserving given the likelihood or otherwise of moral invocations having greater costs than benefits overall. It is simply invalid to argue that an institution is worth preserving on the basis that its invocation is often beneficial. Its invocation may even more often be disastrous.”

Whether or not the impact of MP upon forms of conflict resolution post-vindication of MET would be *disastrous* I leave for the reader to judge. However, I do argue that the impact would be more costly than the impact of a purely non-moral practice that is based upon instrumental reasoning and the utilisation of non-moral mechanisms for promoting prosocial behaviour as detailed in section six of Chapter Six.

## **7. The Problem of Moral Distraction**

**7.1** Keeping in mind the shape of a desirable form of conflict resolution when attempting to resolve a conflict makes it more likely that such a conflict will be resolved in the way targeted. Thus, if we seek to productively resolve

conflicts, then it is important to have in mind what a productive conflict resolution would actually look like in practice in order to guide behaviour that can secure a productive conflict resolution. As noted in 2.5.2 fixing in one's mind what a productive conflict resolution would look like in concrete terms in practice may be difficult, but it is no doubt helpful to focus on maximising desires and limiting harms as far as possible if we seek a productive resolution to any specific conflict.

**7.2** One cost of preserving moral thinking post-vindication of MET is that morality may distract individuals from seeking to resolve conflicts productively in virtue of providing a competing *moral standard* against which to judge differing possible forms of conflict resolution. The following two examples make this problem of moral distraction clearer.

**7.2.1** Two individuals are engaged in a conflict regarding whether or not to be part of a protest against the increasing social acceptance of homosexuality in much of the western world. Both individuals agree that if homosexuality is socially acceptable then more individuals would have their desires fulfilled without any associated increase in safety-relevant harm; both individuals agree how to resolve their conflict productively (not protesting against the social acceptance of homosexuality). However, despite this agreement, one party in the conflict decides to go on the protest march because he believes that homosexuality is *morally abhorrent* - he believes that there are mind-independent and categorically prescriptive reasons directing against homosexuality and acceptance of homosexuality in others.

**7.2.2** Two political parties are engaged in a conflict regarding whether or not to support a military campaign against a dangerous group of terrorists. Both parties agree that military action would help to control the terrorist threat and ensure that most people could safely satisfy their desires; both parties agree what a productive conflict resolution would look like (supporting military intervention). However, despite this agreement one party in the conflict chooses not to support military action because members of that party

believe that state-sanctioned military action is always *morally wrong* no matter the particular consequences of any lack of military intervention. In essence, members of the political party believe that they are *morally obliged* not to use one moral wrong (military engagement) to correct another moral wrong (terrorism) and they believe that there are mind-independent and categorically prescriptive reasons directing against such military action.

**7.3** In the two examples above all the individuals referred to understand what a productive conflict resolution would look like in their specific circumstances – there is no epistemic problem in these cases. However, in the settings as described, moral beliefs direct individuals to act in ways that actively stand against the bringing about of a productive conflict resolution as I defined it in section two. Moral beliefs are thus capable of *distracting* and *misdirecting* individuals when they are deciding how to act – moral beliefs are capable of providing normative guidance (perhaps indirectly) against seeking the promotion of productive conflict resolutions in specific contexts. If moral beliefs can systematically misdirect individuals when they are considering how they should act in a given conflict situation, then the abolition of such moral beliefs would seem to be advantageous if we seek the promotion of productive conflict resolutions – abolition of a competing moral standard for judging behaviour would remove a potential distracting factor in decision-making.

**7.4** However, there are several ways to respond to this supposed problem for MP. Firstly, as per French and Allbright (1998:181), we might be reminded that moral beliefs actually seem to typically favour actions and behaviours that make productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur. As a contingent matter of fact, moral thinking may not distract and misdirect in the ways suggested above.

**7.4.1** Yet, as previously discussed, it must be remembered that MP preserves a mechanism for moral thinking rather than any specific moral doctrine or set of moral doctrines. Given MP, there is no way of denying that individuals

could reason as suggested in the examples in 7.3 and that such individuals could not be convincingly accused of making any unique moral error in doing so. As Garner (2012:14-5) says<sup>64</sup>:

“We could argue about [moral issues] forever without discovering the morally right or best way to proceed, primarily because there is no available moral truth about how we ought to deal with any of them.”

Thus, unless a person makes a logical error there will be no way of convincing them that their moral belief is mistaken without invoking MET and thus undermining the general impact of moral beliefs. If moral judgments regarding morally desirable outcomes, and judgments regarding which conflict resolution is most productive, can come apart (as they clearly can) then it is unhelpful to maintain a competing standard against which to judge the acceptability of differing conflict resolutions even if this competing standard is only costly in a limited number of circumstances; this is a cost that can be painlessly removed. Thus, whether or not normative moral systems actually tend to direct individuals to resolve conflicts productively, it is clear that they will not do so in a non-trivial number of cases. Indeed, Garner (2012:24) seems to offer his own example of this issue when he says that<sup>65</sup>:

“Liberal commentators have expressed surprise that contraception is still thought to be an issue, but they have probably not understood that no moral issue is ever “settled” because, no matter the facts, a moral argument can always be constructed.”

Even if it is demonstrated that conflict between supporters and opponents of contraception would be productively resolved by allowing increased access to contraception, moral beliefs encouraging opposition to contraception may guide behaviour more than judgments relating to which type of resolution would better maximise desire satisfaction without any associated increase in safety-relevant harm.

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<sup>64</sup> The page reference is located in Chapter Eleven of Garner’s book

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**7.5** The supporter of MP need not yet give up at this point in the debate, however. A second response to the problem of moral distraction may be centred on the thought that non-moral, instrumentally grounded reasons may also distract and misdirect individuals when it comes to productive conflict resolution. If non-moral beliefs also misdirect then they may be thought to have no advantage over moral beliefs – for both types of beliefs would both support and oppose the bringing about of productive conflict resolutions in different contexts. The following case should make the possible merit of this objection clearer.

**7.5.1** Two political parties are engaged in a conflict regarding whether or not to support an increase in spending on a national space-exploration program. Both parties agree that more desires would be satisfied if money was spent on other, more earthly, projects. However, members of one of the parties strongly desire to see a human mission to Mars in their lifetime and so continue to campaign for spending on the space program. It seems, therefore, that somewhat selfish desires provide these individuals with non-moral reasons for favouring an unproductive conflict resolution.

**7.5.2** However, the case above can be unpicked so as to minimise the worry that non-moral, instrumental reasons will favour unproductive conflict resolutions. This is because even those individuals who do strongly desire spending on a space program will (if they are not value outliers) also desire the promotion of safety and be naturally disposed to altruism. Thus, these people are very likely to have an all-things-considered instrumental reason in favour spending the money on more earthly projects (or their space-based desires have a more altruistic grounding than I suggested). It is correct that some of these individuals may overly focus on their space exploring desires and suffer from weakness of will in doing so as it pertains to their instrumental reason to productively resolve conflicts, but if their instrumental reason to favour spending on other projects was presented to them in rhetorical or emotionally resonating language then this weakness of will would be at least as likely to be overcome as it would be via presentation of a

moral reason or the elicitation of a moral belief with the same normative guidance.

**7.5.3** In addition, it should be noted that weakness of will would not only afflict individuals in the context where morality is abolished. Individuals who believe that they have moral reasons to act in ways that make a productive conflict resolution more likely will also suffer from weakness of will if they also desire another, different, course of action. The important point is that even if morality is abolished, there are mechanisms to combat weakness of will and most people will have instrumental reasons to act in ways that make productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur even if they have other competing desires.

**7.6** In this section, I have shown how a competing standard against which to judge different possible conflict resolutions can misdirect and distract individuals by making them believe that they morally ought to bring about a different type of conflict resolution to a productive conflict resolution as I have defined it. In the next section, I build on the problem of moral distraction in order to show just how problematic it truly is. Specifically, I make clear that moral thinking can encourage individuals to avoid cooperating with others, thereby making productive conflict resolutions less likely to occur.

## **8. The Problem of Moral Approbation**

**8.1** As I argued in section five, conflicts are more likely to be resolved productively if individuals are empathetically and cooperatively engaged with their opponent in a conflict, amongst other prosocial behaviours and characteristics. However, the problem of moral approbation is based on the fact that moral thinking makes it less likely that an opponent in a conflict, who is viewed as being either morally bad or acting in a morally unacceptable way, will be empathetically and cooperatively engaged with.

**8.2** Making this problem clearer, Hinckfuss (1987:4.2) details how a person with moral beliefs:

“...may even feel obliged to treat their opponent harshly, by resorting to sanctions including physical violence or even death. In this way a moral agent could have an increased, not a lessened, motive for treating his opponent like a *natural disaster*.”<sup>66</sup>

Although it is a contingent feature of what we might call ‘morally framed’ conflicts, viewing an opponent as akin to a ‘natural disaster’ clearly does not make an individual more likely to engage constructively with them in search of a productive conflict resolution.

**8.2.1** Garner (2007) goes some way to making clear why, in a moral conflict, opponents might be viewed as negatively as Hinckfuss suggests. Garner (2007:502) says:

“If the issue is not moralised, *Roe v. Wade* looks like a sensible compromise between two extreme positions, but when the right to life is set against the right to choose, neither side can yield without violating morality...*How can anyone compromise with someone they see as wanting to murder babies?*”<sup>67</sup>

The reason that moral beliefs make us less likely to engage productively with our opponent is because moral beliefs suggest, at least in some circumstances, not merely that our opponent is acting in an undesirable way but that they are violating mind-independent and categorically prescriptive reasons in doing so. The addition of this specifically moral layer of criticism makes any sympathy for that individual less likely (though clearly not impossible) and makes collaboration between combatants less likely also. Compromising with moral sinners, and allowing some of their immoral desires to be satisfied, may be an action that a person is morally compelled to avoid. Moral thinking thus, in certain settings, acts as a barrier against the type of prosocial acting that makes productive conflict resolutions more likely to occur.

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<sup>66</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>67</sup> Emphasis added



**8.3** The problem of moral approbation as described is incomplete because it is necessary not merely to show that moral approbation *could* be a force that makes productive conflict resolution less likely to occur, but that it actually does so in a non-trivial number of circumstances. In order to be relevant to the choice between MA and MP post-vindication of MET the cost associated with moral thinking should be real rather than theoretical.

**8.3.1** Fortunately, examples of moral beliefs that justify and engender extremely negative sentiments against moral opponents are not hard to find. Indeed, many examples of such unhelpful moral thinking have already been provided across the previous two chapters. For example, as referred to in 8.4.1 in Chapter Five, George Galloway defended the possible moral acceptability of assassinating Tony Blair as retribution for his leadership in the Iraq war.<sup>68</sup> In 8.6 in Chapter Six, I provided evidence of seemingly morally backed attacks upon UKIP politicians.<sup>69</sup> Again in 8.4.1 in Chapter Five, I described the apparent case of an individual getting angry with an opponent who he deemed to have made a moral error.<sup>70</sup> These cases show the ways in which people are apt to treat their moral opponents not merely as people with whom they have a disagreement, but as people who *deserve* harsh treatment rather than understanding. In addition, the ‘war on drugs’ highlights the lack of understanding often afforded to individuals who may have been otherwise supported if not for the judgment that they have acted morally inappropriately. Rather than treating drug addiction as a health condition, many Americans (and others) have been incarcerated to a degree that few would suggest is indicative of a productive conflict resolution.<sup>71,72</sup> The removal of moral thinking in this field, and the moral condemnation of drug users, would seem very clearly to make a productive conflict resolution more likely just as is suggested in a review of drugs policy in the United

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<sup>68</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5020222.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5020222.stm)

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3099760/Ukip-MP-Douglas-Carswell-targeted-murderous-lynch-mob-anti-austerity-protesters-clash-police-outside-Parliament.html>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-23568236>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/24/war-on-drugs-40-years>

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.drugpolicy.org/new-solutions-drug-policy/brief-history-drug-war>

Kingdom by The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (2007:13):

“For the reasons already alluded to, we believe that policy on the use of illegal drugs and other psychoactive substances including alcohol and tobacco should in future be pragmatic rather than moralistic, with its means well adapted to its ends. It should be aimed, above all, at reducing harms.”

Clearly, the authors of the report did not believe that a moralistic approach to drug control was doing much to reduce harm and that a non-moral approach (of the type suggested in this thesis) would be superior in securing this end.

**8.3.2** More generally, Rachels (1997:470) says:

“The idea that wrongdoers should be “paid back” for their wickedness is not merely a demand for primitive vengeance. It is part of a moral view with a subtle and complicated structure, that can be supported by a surprisingly strong array of arguments. The key idea is that people deserve to be treated in the same way that they choose to treat others—thus, those who treat other people badly deserve to be treated badly in return.”

My claim is not that moral thinking *necessarily* encourages retributivist, unsympathetic lines of thought but rather that, in a non-trivial number of circumstances, moral thinking makes a strongly negative evaluation of an opponent *more likely* and thereby makes a productive conflict resolution *less likely*. Complex moral views, in the actual world and not merely in the mind of pessimistic MA supporters, can support the punishment of individuals who are judged to have acted in what are believed to be morally wrong ways, rather than suggesting understanding and cooperation in order to ensure that conflicts are resolved as productively as possible. To give another example, rather than working with rhino poachers as suggested in 4.3.1, moral thinking may encourage *only* punishment of poachers with little or no consideration given to the underlying causes of poaching.<sup>73</sup> Given that virtually any action can be claimed as a moral wrong under MP post-vindication of MET, the

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<sup>73</sup> <http://2greenenergy.com/2013/10/09/poachers-of-elephants/>

possibility of moral beliefs and moral approbation acting as barriers to productive conflict resolutions should be clear – post-vindication of MET, no one moral belief is any less *morally justifiable* than any other moral belief regardless of the content of that moral belief.

**8.3.3** I take it now to be clear how and why moral thinking can justify a negative evaluation of an opponent in a conflict – an evaluation so negative that it makes empathy and cooperation less likely and therefore makes a productive conflict resolution less likely also. To reiterate, my claim is not that all individuals who think morally will always treat their opponents as something akin to a ‘natural disaster’ – some moralisers will consider themselves morally bound to treat opponents with love and care, for example. Rather, my claim is that those who utilise moral thinking to justify highly negative views of opponents cannot be swayed by any competing moral argument – MP preserves a mechanism for moral thinking, it does not preserve any specific set of moral doctrines that might be helpful in terms of promoting productive conflict resolutions. By abolishing moral thinking post-vindication of MET, the opportunity to feel *morally* justified in punishing someone is removed as is the ability to view an opponent in a conflict as *morally* beyond-the-pale.

**8.4** At this point it may be objected that the abolition of morality would do little to increase the likelihood of positive evaluations of opponents in conflict settings. With or without moral thinking, people may judge their opponents in a conflict extremely negatively and have little inclination to cooperate with them in an attempt to resolve a conflict productively. For example, if we are in conflict with someone who is harming our family, then whether moral thinking is preserved or not we are very unlikely to care much for their interests and may be very much inclined to ensure they are punished. Equally, whether or not ISIS or Al Qaeda are *morally condemned*, it is hard to imagine a cooperative and empathetic negotiation with these groups in order to productively resolve a conflict.

**8.4.1** However, this objection is misguided for two reasons. Firstly, whether or not we would be likely to empathise or cooperate with harmers such as Al Qaeda is likely to be irrelevant to the bringing about of a productive conflict resolution. The desires of barbaric individuals are not likely to require satisfying as part of a productive conflict resolution given the need to reduce and control safety-relevant harms as far as possible. Thus, the fact that individuals would continue to be disinclined to cooperate with those who have malign desires post-abolition of morality does not, by itself, undercut the problem of moral approbation; productive conflict resolutions will not require cooperation with violent and harming individuals apart from in the most exceptional circumstances.

**8.4.2** In addition, the preservation of morality would also preserve belief in moral reasons that can justify not engaging with opponents in at least some circumstances. Moral beliefs may instead suggest that such people are to be defeated and not to have their desires satisfied to any meaningful degree. While it is correct that even if morality is abolished, then individuals will no doubt continue to find it both difficult and unappealing to empathise and cooperate with particular opponents in a conflict, they could no longer call upon a belief in a *moral justification* not to so cooperate. Belief in moral reasons preserves belief in moral justifications for desires relating to non-cooperation with perceived moral enemies - justifications that would not be available if morality were abolished. This is why the problem of moral approbation highlights a unique cost associated with MP – moral approbation reduces the likelihood of cooperative and empathetic negotiation with opposing combatants via the preservation of a justification not to engage with combatants in such ways even when such cooperation is required in pursuit of a productive conflict resolution. In the post-abolition of morality context, individuals would have non-moral, instrumental reasons to cooperate with opponents that would not be opposed by moral beliefs directing against this course of action, at least in the majority of circumstances.

**8.5** Earlier I outlined the view of Nolan, Restall and West (2005) in so far as they believed that the preservation of morality was desirable post-vindication of MET because it allowed continuing use of a common moral framework and the maintaining of associated tacit understandings. However, given the costs of moral distraction and moral approbation as they pertain to reducing the likelihood of productive conflict resolutions, I am in the same camp as Garner (2007:504) when he suggests that:

“...one of the advantages of eliminativism [MA] is that it frees us from that well-established framework and those tacit understandings”

The common moral framework is a net cost, rather than a net benefit, when it comes to promoting productive conflict resolutions based on the problems discussed in both this section and in section seven. In the next and final substantive section of this chapter, I briefly outline the possible negative effect of the moral hierarchy upon levels of productive conflict resolution.

## **9. The Problem of the Moral Hierarchy**

**9.1** I outlined the shape and nature of the moral hierarchy in section nine of Chapter Five as well as discussing the possible impact of the moral hierarchy upon both the promotion of safety and prosocial behaviour in both of the previous two chapters. I will not unduly extend this chapter by laboriously covering old ground in this chapter but the possible impact of the moral hierarchy does require at least some comment.

**9.2** Initially, it may seem as though the existence of the moral hierarchy would be no threat to levels of productive conflict resolution. This is because productive conflict resolutions are likely to be helpful not only to normal individuals but also to individuals at or near the pinnacle of the moral hierarchy itself. As Hinckfuss (1987:4.5) says:

“...there is reason to believe that, for those who are not of the moral elite, *and even on most occasions for those who are*, long term self-interest would encourage them

to resolve conflicts rationally without appeal to morality, if they were given the opportunity to do so.”<sup>74</sup>

Given that Hinckfuss is discussing conflict resolutions in terms of how to best satisfy individuals on all sides of a conflict, I take it to be fair to substitute ‘productively’ for ‘rationally’ in the above quotation. It is hardly surprising that productive conflict resolutions might typically be helpful to members of the moral hierarchy, given that productive conflict resolutions are precisely resolutions that attempt to maximise desire satisfaction on all sides in a conflict without thereby unduly promoting safety-relevant harms. Thus, we should be initially sceptical of any suggestion that the impact of the moral hierarchy would be to make productive conflict resolutions less likely.

**9.3** However, there is a basis for concern that the moral hierarchy might seek to undermine productive conflict resolutions in certain settings and that moral thinking imbues the hierarchy with the power to do so. For example, if a productive conflict resolution threatens the privileges or statuses of members of the moral hierarchy themselves through satisfying the desires of others, then the members of the moral hierarchy might have reason to issue moral cues that cut against such a productive conflict resolution. Thus, the members of the moral hierarchy may issue moral cues that direct individuals to judge others as individuals not to be cooperated with or to cultivate particular moral beliefs that speak against certain, otherwise productive, conflict resolutions. Again, a further example makes this possibility clearer.

**9.3.1** There is an ongoing conflict in a society regarding how to distribute resources. Assume that the most productive outcome to this conflict would be a more equitable distribution of resources via, perhaps, an increase in certain taxes. However, members of the moral hierarchy would lose out as part of such redistribution and so attempt to cast political opponents as moral villains and the policy itself as morally bad in virtue of it infringing certain inalienable moral rights; the members of the moral hierarchy thus seek to ensure that the

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<sup>74</sup> Emphasis added

changes in policy that would be characteristic of a productive conflict resolution do not occur. Thus, the moral hierarchy deploys moral weapons in an attempt to oppose what would be a productive conflict resolution.

**9.3.2** The actions of newspapers, for example, in the build up to elections show how such moral weapons may be deployed in practice – though I do not seek to assess whether the specific policies opposed in the examples referenced would actually have been productive or not. So, when threatening to become a political leader, it was suggested that Nick Clegg was morally unfit for the role as he received all forms of criticism that could possibly be levelled against him<sup>75</sup>, while when threatening to become Prime Minister himself Ed Miliband was subject to moral criticism through the prism of his deceased father.<sup>76</sup> Newspaper owners who did not like the policies of these men attacked their characters with at least a moral undertone to such criticism.

**9.4** The key issue here is that the interests of the moral hierarchy may diverge from the interests that would be promoted in a productive conflict resolution and as such the members of the moral hierarchy may deploy moral weapons in order to make a productive conflict resolution less likely. If morality was abolished post-vindication of MET, then the leaders and opinion-formers in society would no longer have any such distinctly moral weapons to deploy and would thereby be less able to stop a productive conflict resolution from occurring as it otherwise might. Of course, non-moral weapons and non-morally backed newspaper articles may be used in attempts to sway opinions, but no longer would the members of the moral hierarchy be able to claim a greater mind-independent and categorically prescribed superiority for their views and opinions - they would simply have one opinion amongst others. Thus, the abolition of morality would be helpful in respect of removing a

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<sup>75</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/election/article-1267921/GENERAL-ELECTION-2010-Nick-Clegg-Nazi-slur-Britain.html>

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2435751/Red-Eds-pledge-bring-socialism-homage-Marxist-father-Ralph-Miliband-says-GEOFFREY-LEVY.html>

further distinctly moral barrier to the promotion of productive conflict resolution.

## **10. Conclusion**

**10.1** In this chapter I have argued that MA, rather than MP, is the practice that would better promote productive conflict resolution post-vindication of MET.

**10.2** I began by stipulating a definition of productive conflict resolution that ensured productive conflict resolution was a good that most people would typically strongly desire the promotion of. This justified the assessment of MA and MP in terms of which practice would make instances of productive conflict resolution more likely to occur.

**10.3** I then assessed supposed benefits associated with preserving moral thinking and moral talking in this context. I responded by suggesting that non-moral, instrumental reasons would also direct behaviours that promote productive conflict resolution just as reliably as reasons believed to be moral might do so.

**10.4** Next, I argued that the most effective means of promoting productive conflict resolution is to promote prosocial behaviour. In the light of the conclusion of the previous chapter, this suggested that MA would be the practice that would likely better promote productive conflict resolution.

**10.5** Finally, I buttressed the pro-MA case via discussion of the problems of moral distraction and moral approbation, as well as mentioning the possible impact of the moral hierarchy. I argued that if morality was preserved, a competing moral standard by which an individual could decide which type of conflict resolution to favour would be also preserved and that people would also be less likely to cooperate and empathise with opposing moral combatants if morality was preserved. In addition, the power of the moral



hierarchy to issue moral guidance against productive conflict resolutions that would threaten the privileges of the members of the hierarchy themselves would also be preserved by MP.

**10.6** On the basis of the above, I thus conclude that the abolition rather than the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET would better promote productive conflict resolution. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I argue that the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET, rather than the preservation of morality, would also better promote the final key personal and social good that I discuss - instrumentally valuable true beliefs.

## **Chapter Eight: Promoting True Beliefs**

### **1. Introduction**

**1.1** In the previous three chapters I argued that safety, prosocial behaviour and productive conflict resolution would be better promoted by the abolition rather than the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET. In this final chapter of the thesis I evaluate the impact of Moral Preservationism (MP) and Moral Abolitionism (MA) upon levels of true beliefs post-vindication of MET.

**1.2** I begin by outlining three ways in which true beliefs might be thought to be valuable. In this section, I suggest that most people would desire the promotion of true beliefs because true beliefs are very typically instrumentally valuable. I do not commit myself to a claim regarding the possible intrinsic or eudaimonic value of true beliefs.

**1.3** Next, I argue that the conclusion of this chapter is not entailed by the structures of MA and MP themselves as options post-vindication of MET.

**1.4** Having defended the merit of this chapter, I consider both the MA-friendly argument from evidentialism and the MP-friendly argument from belief in moral reasons. I argue that neither of these arguments is compelling and that neither shows either MA or MP to have an advantage over its rival post-vindication of MET.

**1.5** Finally, I consider the argument from moral distraction and argue that we should expect that true beliefs would be better promoted by the abolition of moral practice post-vindication of MET rather than the preservation of moral practice. I thereby complete the project as set out in Chapter Four and conclude that most people have defeasible, instrumental reasons to favour MA rather than MP post-vindication of MET.

## **2. The Value of True Belief**

**2.1** It is only worthwhile focussing on which practice, MA or MP, better promotes true beliefs post-vindication of MET if most people actually typically desire the promotion of true beliefs – if this is not the case then there would be no advantage for the practice that is more successful in this regard at least in the broader context of the project as stated in Chapter Four. It is therefore crucial at the outset of this chapter to make clear why true beliefs might be considered to be valuable and why most people would desire their promotion.

**2.1.1** In this section I consider three ways in which true beliefs might be said to be valuable.

1. True beliefs as *intrinsically valuable*
2. True beliefs as *eudaimonically valuable*
3. True beliefs as *instrumentally valuable*

Below, I evaluate each of these three options in turn before committing myself only to the final view regarding the value of true beliefs.

**2.2** *True beliefs as intrinsically valuable*: According to Kvanvig (2003:41) true beliefs would be intrinsically valuable if:

“...obtaining the truth is valuable in itself, apart from any contribution it makes to our well-being.”

On this view, true beliefs would be intrinsically valuable if their value was not based upon their impact upon any individual – to put it another way, if their value was not *derived* from their impact upon people and their wellbeing.

Supporting this view, Ross (1930:138-9) says that:

“It seems clear that knowledge, and in a less degree what we may for the present call ‘right opinion’ [true beliefs], are states of mind *good in themselves*.”

The idea that true beliefs are “good in themselves” suggests that the value of such beliefs is not dependent upon any contingent external relation possessed by a true belief. This conception of intrinsic value is similar to what Moore (1959) suggested when he outlined an ‘isolation test’ as a thought-experiment in order to help demarcate the intrinsically valuable from the non-intrinsically valuable. So, Moore (1959:187) advised that:

“...it is necessary to consider what things are such that, if they existed *by themselves*, in absolute isolation, we should yet judge their existence to be good”

Entities that are intrinsically valuable, according to this isolation test, are those entities that possess their value irrespective of any functional role that they might play in the world and irrespective of any external relation they possess – they are entities that are good (*valuable*) even if they are the only entities that exist.

**2.2.1** A Moorean-style isolation test is a difficult thought-experiment to undertake in the context of considering the possible intrinsic value of true beliefs. This is because it is very difficult to imagine true beliefs as being apart from their bearers (minds) and from the objects that form the content of those beliefs. Rather than being possibly isolated, true beliefs seem to be necessarily connected to other existents.

**2.2.2** However, Frankena (1973:72-3) suggests that it is not true beliefs themselves that are intrinsically valuable but rather:

“...it is...the *experience* of them that is good in itself.”

Perhaps it is easier to imagine the isolation of the experience of a true belief rather than to imagine the isolation of a true belief itself. Indeed, perhaps it is the case that the isolation test is actually an unhelpful thought-experiment in any case. This is a controversial matter and if I were to pursue this issue here, I would be inclined to suggest that the isolation test is a helpful way to begin thinking about which objects might possess intrinsic value, but then to deny

that any objects have this type of value at all.<sup>77</sup> However I am not, in this chapter, required to defend any claim of intrinsic value for true beliefs. I am able to avoid a commitment to the intrinsic value of true beliefs because there is a less controversial conception of the value of true beliefs that I can call upon instead in order to justify my claim regarding the general desirability of true beliefs.

**2.3 True beliefs as eudaimonically valuable:** Prior to discussing the less controversial explanation of the general value and desirability of true beliefs, it is worth briefly considering Hazlett's (2013) claim that true beliefs are eudaimonically valuable. Although Hazlett refers to *knowledge* rather than *true beliefs* as being eudaimonically valuable, these concepts are close enough for conflation within the context of my discussion (if not always so suitable for conflation in other discussions and contexts). According to Hazlett (2013:4):

“Eudaimonic value, for a person, concerns what is good and bad for a person, i.e. her wellbeing.”

True beliefs would therefore be eudaimonically valuable if they promoted a person's wellbeing. According to Hazlett (2013:4), wellbeing is related to:

“...welfare, the good life...quality of life, happiness – in the sense of a happy life, rather than the feeling of being happy.”<sup>78</sup>

**2.3.1** It is thus possible to view Hazlett as supporting an ‘objective-list’ theory of welfare.<sup>79</sup> According to Fletcher (2013:210):

“An objective-list theory is simply a list of which things contribute to wellbeing.”

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<sup>77</sup> Beardsley (1965) builds on thoughts from Dewey in criticising the concept of intrinsic value generally. It is worth noting that some, such as Kagan (1998), have suggested that an entity may possess intrinsic value as a result of certain of its extrinsic properties. Again, this is not a debate that I enter into here.

<sup>78</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>79</sup> Hazlett attempts to remain neutral between what he calls ‘desire-independent’ and ‘desire-fulfilment’ views of welfare (2013:21). My characterisation of his view may be slightly unfair or biased, but I use his words to illustrate at least a possible view of the value of true beliefs and a view that he seems to support at least at times.

On this view, the possession of true beliefs typically (not necessarily, in all cases) just makes our life go better – regardless of whether or not those true beliefs make us any happier in a subjective, emotional sense at a particular time. For Hazlett (2013:127) true beliefs are only eudaimonically valuable if they are interesting, significant or:

“...partially constitutive of the valuable whole that is the good life of the believer.”

**2.3.2** However, I am not required here to endorse the claim that true beliefs are eudaimonically valuable either, if eudaimonic value is taken to be derivable other than from the satisfaction of desires (the focus of the next section is on the link between true beliefs and desire satisfaction). This is good news, because there is at least a *prima facie* tension between my support of MET in Chapters One and Three and the view that the possession of certain items objectively (mind-independently?) makes a life go better even if a person does not secure any more of their desires as a result of possession of that item (e.g. a true belief). While it was worth considering another potential justification for the typical value of true beliefs – a justification that may have explained why most people actually value the promotion of true beliefs - with a less controversial understanding of the value of true beliefs in the offing I again am not required to pursue this understanding any further.

**2.4 True beliefs as instrumentally valuable:** Hazlett (2013) suggested that true beliefs were valuable because they positively contributed to a person’s welfare. However, rather than characterising welfare in terms of an objective-list theory of wellbeing it is possible to argue that true beliefs make a contribution to welfare in virtue of promoting the satisfaction of desires. Whyte (1990:149) neatly summarises the view that true beliefs can be *instrumentally* valuable in this way:

“Truth is the property that we want most of our beliefs to possess: and not because truth is beauty and we want our beliefs to be beautiful; nor for any other especially

noble reason. *We want our beliefs to be true simply because, when they are, we get what we want by acting on them.*<sup>80</sup>

Below, consider two examples to make clear just how true beliefs can be so instrumentally valuable in virtue of their facilitating the satisfaction of desires.

**2.4.1** Assume that the following propositions are true: (1) Claire desires a drink, (2) Claire is next to a fridge, (3) there is water in the fridge that Claire is next to and (4) there are no restrictions upon use of the water in the fridge that Claire is next to. If Claire has relevant true beliefs in this situation – if she believes the propositions cited – then she will be able to satisfy her desire and quench her thirst. However, if Claire lacks these true beliefs then she may fail to satisfy her desire and fail to quench her thirst as she may, for example, believe there to be no water in the fridge. Thus, relevant true beliefs would be instrumentally useful for Claire in this context in respect of raising the likelihood that she satisfies her desire.

**2.4.2** Assume that the following propositions are true: (1) Boris desires to get home from work without avoidable delay, (2) the petrol gauge in Boris' car is accurate, (3) the petrol gauge in Boris' car shows that Boris lacks sufficient fuel to drive home, (4) there is a petrol station on Boris' route home and (5) Boris has the financial means to pay for petrol at the petrol station that is on his route home. In this circumstance, the possession of relevant true beliefs would help Boris to satisfy his desire to get home without avoidable delay and reduce the likelihood of him running out of petrol en route. Again, relevant true beliefs would be instrumentally useful in this context in respect of raising the likelihood of Boris satisfying his desire.

**2.4.3** It is worth briefly noting one meta-cognitive issue that I will not discuss in future sections. In order for Claire and Boris to actually have the satisfaction of their desires made more likely by the possession of relevant true beliefs, these individuals must also *accept that their relevant beliefs are true*. If, for example, Claire made a second-order judgment that her belief that 'there is

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<sup>80</sup> Emphasis added

water in the fridge' is false, then her merely possessing the first-order true belief may not help Claire to facilitate the satisfaction of her desire. However, in the discussion to come no such issues will be considered as relevant for the sake of simplicity and in the cases discussed I assume no second-order judgments regarding the truth-values of first-order true beliefs are relevant.

**2.5** It is clear that not all true beliefs will be instrumentally valuable in all contexts for not all true beliefs will aid desire satisfaction. The following example highlights why this is the case.

**2.5.1** Assume that the following propositions are true: (1) David has a job interview, (2) David has long coveted the job that he is interviewing for, (3) David is prone to stress in pressured environments, (4) David has less relevant experience than other candidates in respect of the job that he is applying for, (5) David would require more training in the use of Microsoft Excel than the other candidates and (6) another of the candidates selected for interview has previously been employed by the company offering the job. In this setting, it is not clear that the possession of relevant true beliefs would help David to satisfy his desire and secure the job. On the contrary, relevant false beliefs, rather than relevant true beliefs, may actually make it more likely that David satisfies his desire in this setting.<sup>81</sup> If, for example, David believed that he had more experience than other candidates or that none of the other candidates were personally known to the selection panel, then he may be better able to control his stress and perform better in the interview process. Thus, in this situation, specific false beliefs might seem to be more instrumentally valuable than true beliefs.<sup>82</sup>

**2.5.2** Other examples of situations where specific false beliefs may be more instrumentally valuable than true beliefs are not difficult to imagine. A footballer, for example, might be more likely to play well if she falsely believes that putting her socks on in a particular order will bring her good luck on the

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<sup>81</sup> Other placebo effects may also help David in this circumstance but this does not undermine the claim that false beliefs may be helpful in the way described.

<sup>82</sup> This is similar to an example provided by Hazlett (2013:8).



pitch. In addition, Hare (1981:39) also suggested that rather than forming utilitarian first-order beliefs (that he would take to be true):

“There are, then, both practical and psychological reasons for having relatively simple principles of action if we are to learn to behave either morally or skilfully or with prudence.”

In the context of utilitarianism, Hare thus suggested that strictly false beliefs might help in decision-making contexts in order to better promote ‘the good’.

**2.5.3** Assuming that most people desire the satisfaction of their desires (I return to this point in 2.6) it is no longer clear, given the above, whether or not most people should seek to promote either true beliefs or false beliefs - both can be instrumentally valuable in different contexts. However, in this chapter I focus on the promotion of true beliefs because true beliefs are more reliably bearers of instrumental value than are false beliefs. Whereas false beliefs are valuable in only a limited number of settings true beliefs are typically instrumentally valuable in science, engineering, economics, policing, aviation and many other contexts. In the case of science, for example, Harris (2005:243) says:

“I do have a powerful interest in living in a society and indeed a world in which scientific research is vigorously pursued and is given a high priority.”

If vigorous scientific research produces more true beliefs, then diseases are more likely to be cured and useful new technologies constructed. Feyerabend (1974) has argued that no scientific theory is ever fully consistent with the facts and that scientific progress often occurs from the positing of *ad hoc* postulates. However, I am focussed on the value of true beliefs *qua true beliefs* rather than the value of true beliefs *qua justified beliefs* and I take it that if a belief is true then it does enable a person to interact with the world in a way that makes the satisfaction of their desire more likely, at least most of the time (as per Whyte in 2.4). Feyerabend may be correct that *ad hoc* postulation may advance science but this claim regarding justification of belief, and useful mechanisms of belief formation, does not run counter to my

claim regarding the value of true beliefs in scientific contexts. Indeed, even if I am wrong and Feyerabend would oppose the thought that true beliefs are as instrumentally useful in science as I suggest, then this is an objection that I am happy to face down without further comment for intuition is strongly on the side of my claim as described.

**2.5.4** Given the above, it is important not to give undue importance to the very few contexts in which false beliefs may be more instrumentally valuable than true beliefs. Indeed, the claim of the unrepresentativeness of instrumentally valuable false beliefs is bolstered by further consideration of the circumstances where false beliefs may possess instrumental utility. For example, if David from the example in 2.5.1 continued to falsely believe that he was more talented than he actually is outside of the job interview context, where such a false belief may have been instrumentally helpful, then this false belief is likely to be costly in respect of facilitating the satisfaction of David's future desires. This is because such a false belief may encourage David not to work as hard as he needs to when he may be better served by the true belief that the 'sword of Damocles' hangs over his head in the office each day. It is therefore fair to state that in ordinary life, outside of very specific settings, true beliefs will be more reliably instrumentally valuable than false beliefs in respect of making desire satisfaction more likely.

**2.5.5** In addition, as regards the superstitious footballer as described in 2.5.2, she presumably only gains from her false belief if she herself believes it to be *true* that putting her socks on in a particular order will help her to play better – this belief would seem to lose its potency if she accepted that it was false at the very time that she sought to benefit from it. This type of example only seems to make sense against a background acceptance of the value of true beliefs rather than false beliefs.

**2.6** If true beliefs are more frequently instrumentally valuable than false beliefs in respect of facilitating desire satisfaction, the final claim that I need to defend in this section is the claim that most people have a standing second-

order desire that the first-order desires of both themselves and others be satisfied. This is required in order to defend the claim that most people would desire the promotion of true beliefs in virtue of the general instrumental value of such true beliefs.

**2.6.1** As I have done throughout the latter half of this thesis, I accept the possibility of value outliers who may lack a second-order desire that either their first-order desires, or the first-order desires of others, be satisfied. However, given that most people are naturally disposed to altruism (as per section four of Chapter Six), which requires them to have positive, fundamentally other-directed desires, such outliers are likely very rare indeed. On the contrary, it is hardly implausible to suggest that most people would favour the practice that better promoted true beliefs if true beliefs are generally instrumentally valuable in the way suggested.

**2.6.2** A bigger worry in this context may be that most people will not desire the satisfaction of *all* desires. For example, most people will not desire the satisfaction of particularly malicious or mean-spirited desires that may threaten to increase levels of harm. However, while this is the case, it should not be allowed to obscure the general fact that most desires are not so threatening or harmful and so most people would be happy if they were satisfied. It is therefore fair to state that most people have a second-order desire that first-order desires be satisfied *in most circumstances*; this is especially true given our natural disposition to altruism and the limit that this places on powerful, harmful desires.

**2.7** Limited by relatively minor qualifications, I close this section by suggesting that the practice, MA or MP, that better promotes true beliefs post-vindication of MET will be the practice that most people should favour *ceteris paribus*. Although not all true beliefs are instrumentally valuable, most are. In addition, although most people do not desire the satisfaction of all desires, most people do desire the satisfaction of most of the desires of both themselves and others. Thus, most people would desire the promotion of true

beliefs in general and there will be an advantage for the practice, MA or MP, which better promotes such true beliefs post-vindication of MET.

### **3. Not an Obvious Conclusion**

**3.1** Prior to evaluating the substantive arguments in favour of MA and MP in the coming sections, it is important to make clear that the conclusion of this chapter is not implied merely by the structures of MA and MP themselves as options post-vindication of MET.

**3.2** Specifically, it is necessary to make clear that the mere fact that MP advises false or fictional beliefs post-vindication of MET, whereas MA encourages true beliefs in respect of the truth-values of non-negative moral propositions post-vindication of MET, does not imply that MA better promotes true beliefs overall. An analogy with money makes clear why this is not the case. A person who seeks to positively improve his bank balance might seem to have a very good reason not to spend any money from his account, as far as possible. However, in reality, a person may actually improve his bank balance by 'speculating to accumulate'; a bank balance could be improved by positive investment of money on the stock market, into businesses or into racehorses.

**3.3** In a sense, the same may be true in respect of promoting true beliefs. If a person seeks the promotion of true beliefs, it is at least possible that the acquisition of false or fictional beliefs in one setting may help to facilitate the acquisition of true beliefs in other settings – speculation of specific false beliefs may aid the accumulation of true beliefs more generally. Of course, the MP supporter requires a concrete argument to show that this is the case but it is clearly not conceptually impossible that MP might better promote true beliefs more generally than would MA. The conclusion of this chapter is therefore not so obvious so as to undermine the merit of the discussion to follow.

## **4. Argument from Evidentialism**

**4.1** Unlike in previous chapters I begin by first considering a possible MA-friendly argument rather than immediately considering how the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET might better promote the good under focus. In order to get what I term the ‘argument from evidentialism’ off the ground, it is first necessary to be clearer about the theory of evidentialism itself. According to Piazza (2009:311):

“Evidentialism is the theory of justification according to which the justification of a person’s belief at *t* supervenes on the evidence that person has at *t*.”

From the Piazza quote, it is possible to view evidentialism as a descriptive theory of justification that allows analysis of whether or not a belief is justified by assessing the evidence in support of that belief. However, the theory also has a normative edge, for according to Aikin (2006:327):

“Evidentialism is the view that believing is governed by the norm that subjects should believe neither more than nor contrary to what their current evidence supports.”

Thus, according to evidentialism *qua normative theory* I should only believe the proposition ‘there is a table in the kitchen’ if I have a sufficient level of evidence supporting this belief. From here, when I refer to evidentialism I have the normative form in mind.

**4.2** Evidentialism has its critics (Reisner (2014)) as well as its supporters (Aikin (2006) and Shah (2006)). Here, I do not here engage in any general defence of evidentialism. However, I take it to be at least *prima facie* plausible that an evidentialist restriction upon belief formation would help the promotion of true beliefs. This is because if we proportion our beliefs to the evidence, rather than just believing propositions on ‘gut feeling’ or ‘emotion’, for example, then we seem to be more likely to acquire true beliefs. Therefore, strengthening a disposition for people to follow the normative dictates of evidentialism would seem to make the promotion of true beliefs more likely. I

accept, however, that I am a hostage to fortune on this point in the context of the argument to follow.

**4.3** Assuming that a general commitment to evidentialism would aid the promotion of true beliefs, the ‘argument from evidentialism’ as it applies in this chapter is based on the following thought. Pragmatic justification rather than evidential justification in the moral context may make non-evidential justification of beliefs more likely in other settings; there may be a problem of non-evidentialist *contagion*. In other words, if individuals come to believe that certain non-negative moral propositions are true (whether this belief is straightforwardly false or ‘fictional’ in nature) when in fact this belief is not called for by the available evidence (as it would not be given MET), then individuals may be more likely to be tempted to acquire beliefs without recourse to the evidence in other contexts as well.

**4.4** As it stands, this charge may seem to be both highly speculative and highly implausible. However, there is some limited evidence that people who form beliefs on non-evidential grounds in one context are also more likely to do so in other contexts. For example, Mackenzie-Brown (2003:615-6) outlines research that indicates that belief in God reduced amongst the most eminent scientists between the years of 1914 and 1933, but did not reduce amongst the class of lesser scientists more broadly (indeed she says that the data suggests an increase in such belief among this class). If we assume that belief in God is faith-based rather than evidence based, and that scientists become more eminent in virtue of acquiring and spreading new true beliefs, then it might be suggested that by ridding themselves of a tendency to form non-evidence-based beliefs in one area of their lives particular scientists became more likely to gather true beliefs in other areas of their lives.

**4.4.1** However, even in the light of the Mackenzie-Brown (2003) data it seems extremely implausible that a person’s general commitment to evidentialism would be weakened by the formation of pragmatically justified beliefs, or faith based beliefs, in very a specific context in their life – whether this be a

moral or a religious context. In fact, the example of faith-based religious beliefs cuts both ways in the scientific setting, for religious scientists are seemingly no less capable than their non-religious colleagues when it comes to acquiring true beliefs about stars, lungs, protons or dogs; such scientists do not routinely cry 'miracle' when faced with a puzzling set of data. Therefore, the data cited by Mackenzie-Brown (2003) seems to call for a different type of explanation other than the suggestion that non-evidentialist tendencies in one setting undermine evidentialist tendencies in other settings.

**4.5** I do not take the argument from evidentialism to highlight a problem for the defender of MP in this chapter. Even if it is assumed (as seems plausible) that a commitment to evidentialism would help to promote true beliefs, it is not plausible that the allowance of non-evidentially justified beliefs in the moral context would undermine evidentialist commitments more generally. Buoyed by success in the previous three chapters, the optimistic MA-supporter may have been tempted to suggest a problem of contagion in respect of an anti-evidentialist method of belief formation post-vindication of MET if morality was preserved, but there is little reason to be optimistic about the prospects of such an argument. Upon initial investigation, the situation may be thought to be analogous to the eating of a chocolate bar – where one illicit act of eating a chocolate bar seems often to bring about the eating of a second or third chocolate bar thereafter; one 'mistake' and the floodgates are opened. However, the analogy turns out to be highly implausible, for just because beliefs are formed on pragmatic grounds in one area of life does not make it more likely that beliefs would be formed on non-evidentialist grounds in other, distinct, areas of life. Thus, from here I do not consider the argument from evidentialism any further. If I am overly generous in dismissing the argument from evidentialism, then it should be noted that I take there to be a more plausible MA-friendly argument that is the focus of discussion in sections seven and eight of this chapter.

## **5. Argument from Belief in Moral Reasons**

**5.1** With the pro-MA argument from evidentialism rejected in section four I now consider the pro-MP argument from belief in moral reasons.<sup>83</sup> This argument is structurally identical to previous MP-friendly arguments discussed across Chapters Five to Seven in respect of considering the potentially helpful direction of morally-loaded normative guidance post-vindication of MET in terms of promoting the key good under focus. As was hinted at in section three, the argument from belief in moral reasons suggests that by preserving morality post-vindication of MET we can better promote true (non-moral) beliefs in various areas of life.

**5.2** The argument from belief in moral reasons as I present it proceeds via highlighting specific circumstances in which moral beliefs may encourage the acquisition of true beliefs and drawing general conclusions therefrom. The following examples seem to be of situations of the appropriate type.

**5.3** Moral beliefs may help to promote true beliefs in science, if moral beliefs either encourage more people into scientific study or encourage the spreading of scientific knowledge. To this end, Harris (2005) actually titles his paper “Scientific Research is a Moral Duty” while Vucetich and Nelson (2010:49) suggest that scientists have a duty (that seems to be moral in nature) to advocate when they state that:

*“Scientists are obligated to speak out against major dangers to society, like climate change.”*

Thus Vucetich and Nelson (2010:49) claim that:

*“It is time to stop discussing whether scientists should be advocates and move onto the difficult business of learning how to do so wisely.”*

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<sup>83</sup> I use ‘moral reasons’ as a catch-all term for moral normative guidance, whether it is believed to come in the form of reasons/obligations/duties etc. Nothing important hangs on this choice of terminology in this chapter.



If we assume that scientific advocacy involves the spreading of true scientific beliefs, then a moral justification for advocacy would seem to be helpful in making scientists more likely to spread true beliefs to others, for as Joyce (2001:181) says:

“Morality...imbues certain desirable actions with a “must-be-doneness”, which raises the likelihood of their being performed.”

Of course, spreading true scientific beliefs to the general population may not always be instrumentally valuable because true beliefs regarding the structures of atoms or regarding the maths behind the Higgs-Boson discovery would not seem to help many people satisfy their desires. In addition, spreading true beliefs regarding the science of building home-made chemical weapons would also not seem to be instrumentally valuable for most people. However, in general (which is what matters to my claim) the spreading of scientific true beliefs is helpful in respect of general desire-satisfaction amongst members of the population at large. Indeed, new scientists who might be next in line to build helpful new technologies or cure terrible diseases are better off standing on the shoulders of their peers compared to the situation where their peers hoard true scientific beliefs or otherwise keep such true beliefs quiet.

**5.4** In the context of engineering, moral thinking might also make the promotion of true beliefs more likely. As evidence of this possibility, consider the words of the Chief Executive of ‘The Aviation Consulting Group’ as he advises engineers to<sup>84</sup>:

“...be part of the team effort to make safety the no.1 priority...*Watch for opportunities to draw the line between right and wrong...Be alert for business expediency that drives unsafe deviations from approved procedures...Ask yourself if actions deemed legally or technically acceptable could be morally wrong.*”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> <http://flightsafety.org/aerosafety-world-magazine/february-2011/do-the-right-thing>

<sup>85</sup> Emphasis added

Such moral guidance would seem to help to promote true beliefs amongst engineers as engineers would consider themselves morally obligated to improve their skills and refine their practices in order to reduce risk – presumably risk is better reduced by engineers who possess relevant true beliefs.

**5.4.1** In addition, moral beliefs may also encourage individuals into engineering sectors that they otherwise would not have considered, thereby fostering the acquisition of true beliefs that otherwise would not have been gained. To this end, students in More Economically Developed Countries have been advised that<sup>86</sup>:

“The technologically advanced nations of the world have a *moral obligation to develop technologies* that conserve existing water resources in our own countries and make available the technology to other countries who struggle to supply their people with adequate clean drinking water.”<sup>87</sup>

Again, moral guidance of this type would seem to encourage the promotion of true beliefs amongst those seeking to develop the technologies that they feel morally obliged to work on.

**5.5** In the context of policing, officers hoping to join the force in Harrison, New York are required to possess the core values as defined in the mission statement of the department. This means that they can expect to be judged on their “moral courage” as characterised by<sup>88</sup>:

“...adherence to principle, integrity, and obligation no matter how convenient it may be to do otherwise. It is putting character ahead of expediency; of putting what is right ahead of what may be popular.”

Officers may therefore feel morally compelled to get to the truth of a situation even if it is more convenient to do otherwise.

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.technologystudent.com/enerfish/wat1.html>

<sup>87</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.harrison-ny.gov/police>

**5.6** The argument from belief in moral reasons suggests that moral belief would be pragmatically useful post-vindication of MET due to preserving morally backed normative directives for behaviours that help to promote true beliefs in a wide range of contexts. Therefore, post-vindication of MET, we would seem to be wise in preserving moral thinking in order to better promote true belief acquisition because moral thinking can support, justify and motivate the types of behaviours that lead to the promotion of true beliefs.

## **6. Response to Argument from Belief in Moral Reasons**

**6.1** As in previous chapters, I concede that *moral thinking* can sometimes aid the promotion of true beliefs just as moral thinking can sometimes aid the promotion of safety and productive conflict resolutions, for example. For this reason, I do not take issue with any of the example cases cited in section five that seemed to indicate the positive effect of moral thinking upon the promotion of true beliefs in particular contexts.

**6.2** Despite this, as should now be clear from previous chapters, the fact that moral thinking can be helpful *on occasion* in respect of promoting a commonly desired good does not imply that moral thinking is better than non-moral thinking in respect of promoting true beliefs more broadly. In this section, I suggest how non-moral, instrumental thinking could be *at least as helpful* as moral thinking in terms of promoting true beliefs (a more positive MA-argument in terms of highlighting an advantage possessed by MA verses MP is reserved for sections seven and eight).

**6.3** If true beliefs are as instrumentally valuable as suggested in section two then most people will typically have instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs – they will only lack such non-moral, instrumental reasons when true beliefs are not instrumentally valuable to them. Thus, even if, assuming MP, most people might have moral beliefs regarding obligations to promote true

beliefs in scientific, engineering and policing settings etc., then this would not imply that most people would not also have non-moral, instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs in just those same settings post-abolition of morality.

**6.3.1** Of course, the mere fact that a person recognises that they have an instrumental reason to promote, for example, true beliefs in biology in order to help reduce deaths caused by certain diseases does not imply that such a person would actually be sufficiently motivated so as to drop everything in order to take up scientific study – instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs are just one type of instrumental reason to be weighed alongside others in decision making. However, even in the context where morality is preserved post-vindication of MET, problems of competing reasons will also arise and it is far from clear why such problems would be less acute; in what seems to be a morally loaded contemporary society many people are not focussed on promoting true beliefs in science, for example. Indeed, in sections seven and eight I argue that moral thinking can actually distract individuals from the task of promoting true beliefs by encouraging and justifying anti-true-belief-promoting behaviour. Crucially, if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET, then normative suggestions to promote true beliefs would seem to be just as ubiquitous as they are pre-abolition of morality because most people would have instrumental reasons to promote (typically instrumentally valuable) true beliefs. Moral thinking that is helpful in this context would be mirrored by helpful non-moral thinking post-abolition of morality.

**6.3.2** It may be objected at this stage that moral thinking might be especially helpful in motivating the promotion of true beliefs via better helping to overcome weakness of will compared to non-moral thinking. However, as discussed in section seven of Chapter Five, non-moral thinking based on the acceptance of instrumental reasons can be just as motivationally powerful as moral thinking if instrumental reasons are clearly outlined, rhetorically framed and delivered in an emotionally resonating form. Therefore, even if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET, then people could still be provided

with motivationally efficacious reasons to promote true beliefs in settings where doing so may be very difficult and may require robust motivational support. Again, this is not to suggest that weakness of will would not affect the promotion of true beliefs if morality was abolished, for it most certainly would. It is, however, to suggest that weakness of will would be no more of a problem given the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET compared to the situation if morality was preserved post-vindication of MET.

**6.4** It also may be objected that moral thinking might be especially helpful, compared to non-moral thinking, in supporting the satisfaction of the desires of others rather than supporting the satisfaction only of prudentially advantageous desires. However, this objection ignores the work of section five in Chapter Five where it was argued that most people have a disposition to altruism that predates any moral thinking. It is therefore reasonable to believe that people would continue to have non-moral, instrumental reasons to satisfy the desires of others as well as themselves, as long as those desires were not harmful or malicious etc.

**6.5** I do not wish to labour discussion in this section, for responses to arguments from belief in moral reasons have been delivered in both Chapters Five and Seven. If the response is flawed in this chapter then it is likely in virtue of a more general flaw that I have not identified rather than in virtue of a concern specific to the promotion of true beliefs. Thus, I conclude that moral guidance in favour of promoting true beliefs will be mirrored by non-moral, instrumentally grounded guidance – at least in situations where true beliefs are instrumentally valuable. Of course, people would not have non-moral, instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs when those beliefs would not be instrumentally valuable and it is possible that moral thinking could direct the promotion of such true beliefs far more reliably. However, this is hardly a concern for the MA supporter given that the value of true belief in this chapter is assumed to be derived from the general instrumental utility of such beliefs as described in section two. Moral thinking is therefore no more useful than non-moral thinking in respect of promoting *instrumentally*

*valuable* true beliefs even if it can better promote non-instrumentally valuable true beliefs.

## **7. Argument from Moral Distraction**

**7.1** Having argued that the abolition of moral thinking post-vindication of MET would not undermine the promotion of true beliefs, at least where true beliefs are instrumentally valuable, in this section I argue that the reverse claim is true – preservation of morality post-vindication of MET would undermine the promotion of (instrumentally valuable) true beliefs and so most people should favour the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET *ceteris paribus*.

**7.2** This argument invokes the same concept of moral distraction as invoked in section seven of Chapter Seven. As there, it is crucial to keep in mind the fact that, as per Garner (2012:7-8) and (2012:14-5), there is no way of arguing that one moral belief is any more *morally* justified than any other moral belief post-vindication of MET; all *non-negative* moral beliefs are equally false.<sup>89</sup> Given this, it is just as possible that belief in moral reasons could encourage behaviour that undermines the promotion of true beliefs as it is possible that such belief in moral reasons could encourage behaviour helpful to the promotion of true beliefs. Consider the following examples making this clearer.

**7.3** In 5.3 I noted that according to Vucetich and Nelson (2010) scientists have a moral obligation to be advocates. Indeed, for Vucetich and Nelson (2010:49) scientists:

*“...have a moral obligation first to be good citizens, second to be good scholars, and third to be good scientists.”*

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<sup>89</sup> The page references are located in Chapters One and Eleven of Garner’s book respectively.

The content of what is actually required of a (morally) good citizen will clearly vary from culture to culture and society to society. In certain societies, for example, being a good citizen may involve not embarrassing the leadership of that society or not providing theories that undermine a widespread belief in the justification of particular courses of action. Socrates, after all, was not viewed as a morally good citizen by some of his, particularly powerful, fellow citizens.

**7.3.1** While the possibility that a scientist may be morally required not to promote true beliefs (for this would undermine her status as a morally good citizen) may seem to be remote and implausible, consider the following situation that is very loosely based on a real life case (I have altered the case so as to take the most cynical interpretation of events, rather than an interpretation that may be most accurate). A team of scientists may discover evidence that threatens a well-established theory – such as the theory that global warming is occurring and is highly influenced and exacerbated by the actions of the human race. However, these scientists might be informed by members of the moral hierarchy that if such data was released they would not be acting as good citizens because society is better served by the belief that renewable technology is important and should be invested in (perhaps renewable technology helps job creation, for example). Thus, in an attempt to act in accordance with a believed moral reason, the scientists in question might feel the need to unduly and unfairly ‘stack the evidential decks’ to the benefit of the position that they take themselves to have a moral reason to favour.<sup>90</sup>

**7.3.2** Again, I do not seek to hang much on the factual accuracy of the case cited. However, more importantly, the case cited hints at the possibility of moral beliefs *distracting* scientists from focussing on the promotion only of true beliefs; if moral thinking is preserved, then so too is a moral standard against which to judge particular beliefs not as *true* or *false* but as *morally acceptable* or *morally unacceptable*. To paraphrase Garner (2007:502) – how

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<sup>90</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jul/07/climate-emails-question-answer>

could a morally good scientist justify spreading a belief (*even if is true*) that makes a morally sound outcome less likely to occur? It is this danger that remains if morality is preserved post-vindication of MET.

**7.4** The possible distracting effects of moral thinking are not confined to scientific practice. The famous anti-utilitarian example from McCloskey (1965:253) makes clear how moral thinking could distract police officers from attempting to promote true beliefs:

“...suppose that a sheriff were faced with the choice of either framing a Negro for a rape that had aroused hostility to the Negroes (a particular Negro generally believed to be guilty but whom the sheriff knows not to be guilty) - and thus preventing serious anti-Negro riots which would probably lead to some loss of life and increased hatred of each other by whites and Negroes - or of hunting for the guilty person and thereby allowing the anti-Negro riots to occur, while doing the best he can to combat them. In such a case the sheriff, if he were an extreme utilitarian, would appear to be committed to framing the Negro.”

In this example it is a moral belief that allows the sheriff to justify not attempting to promote true beliefs amongst others. Of course, utilitarians may have responses to this type of example but this is actually beside the point – what matters is that moral thinking could justify behaviour of this type whether or not equally false non-negative moral propositions may be offered in condemnation of the sheriff's actions. As ever, it must be kept in mind that no moral view is ever more morally justified than any other moral view post-vindication of MET.

**7.5** The examples offered in this section suggest that moral thinking can distract individuals from the promotion of true beliefs. As an option post-vindication of MET, MP preserves a mechanism for moral thinking rather than any specific moral doctrine and as such it is impossible to argue that only true-belief-promoting moral doctrines would be available if morality was preserved post-vindication of MET. Given that, as per section six, non-moral, instrumental thinking can be just as helpful in respect of promoting true beliefs as can moral thinking in situations where such moral thinking might



actually be helpful, it appears that MA would better promote true beliefs post-vindication of MET than would MP in virtue of eliminating the costs associated with distracting moral thinking as described in this section; nothing helpful is lost by the abolition of morality but certain distractions are dispensed with.

## **8. Response to Argument from Moral Distraction**

**8.1** However, the case for MA is not complete just in virtue of the discussion in section seven. The MP supporter may yet respond to the examples and broad suggestions of the previous section. I consider such responses in this section before ultimately defending the conclusion as stated in favour of MA.

**8.2** Firstly, the defender of MP may suggest that the problem of distraction applies no more to moral thinking than it does to non-moral thinking; just as a non-moral, instrumentally grounded belief may ‘mirror’ a ‘true-belief-promoting’ moral belief in terms of normative guidance offered, so too a non-moral, instrumental belief may distract a person from seeking the promotion of true beliefs.<sup>91</sup>

**8.2.1** The examples provided in section seven of distracting moral beliefs do seem to add to the plausibility of the above complaint. Firstly, consider the case of the sheriff as outlined by McCloskey (1965:253) in 7.4. In the example as described, it is quite plausible that a sheriff who had no moral beliefs at all – who had opted to rid himself of moral thoughts post-vindication of MET – would also decide to scapegoat the innocent man in order to avoid a deadly riot. As suggested in Chapter Four, and as evidenced by the discussion in Chapters Five to Seven, individuals do not value goods in isolation – the desire to promote true beliefs in any setting is balanced in practice by a desire to productively resolve a conflict or to promote safety. Thus, an individual who desires the promotion of safety may well have a non-moral, instrumental

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<sup>91</sup> In this section I discuss only instrumentally valuable true beliefs and so do not repeat the discussion from 6.5.

reason to encourage false belief just as the sheriff did in the example in 7.4. In addition, as for the example in 7.3.1, it is also possible that a person who values safety and general economic wellbeing may recognise a non-moral, instrumental reason to be 'pragmatically minded' when faced with the prospect of releasing scientific data that might make a particularly attractive set of circumstances less likely to occur.

**8.3** The case has not been made convincingly that moral thinking would be costlier than non-moral thinking post-vindication of MET in respect of promoting true beliefs because both modes of thought appear to be capable of *distracting* individuals from focussing on the promotion of true beliefs alone. In order to defend the view that moral thinking would be *more* distracting than non-moral thinking in this context more is needed than the examples hitherto provided – it is also necessary to show that moral thinking can distract individuals in situations where non-moral thinking would not to do so.

**8.3.1** Fortunately, there are reasons for believing that such situations may occur specifically in settings where individuals do have strong non-moral, instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs - even when this non-moral, instrumental reason is viewed in the context of the different ends and goods that a person desires to be promoted. Consider the following cases as illustrative.

**8.4** A belief in a *moral duty* to protect a friend and colleague who has made an error in an engineering project may encourage the covering up a maintenance defect that a person would have a non-moral, instrumental reason to report. This moral justification for excess loyalty to friends could be costly in terms of facilitating false belief that a repair has been carried out correctly. This form of moral justification would be abolished if MA was favoured post-vindication of MET, reducing the likelihood of such a 'cover up' occurring. This situation may not be common, but it is hardly especially unlikely, for as Grunebaum (1993:51) says:

“That we owe special duties to our friends or that we ought to treat friends with special preference is a belief held by almost every culture.”

A desire to help our friends before others may persist post-abolition of morality, for as Grunebaum (1993:51) also says:

“It is of course an error to try to define friendship exclusively in terms of moral duties.”

However, given that our natural disposition to altruism is not restricted to friends, then the abolition of a moral justification for such behaviour would seem to minimise the possibility that a distracting moral belief would undermine the promotion of an instrumentally valuable true belief in cases similar to the example above.

**8.5** Moral beliefs may also direct individuals to avoid working with other groups of people in a way that undermines the promotion of true beliefs generally. For example, a certain group of people may be classed as moral outsiders or morally inferior in a particular society such that cooperation with members of that group is deemed to be morally unacceptable (the example of a caste system, backed by moral judgments, may provide a real-world example of this type<sup>92</sup>). Plausibly, true beliefs are more likely to be promoted in various disciplines if the talents of all groups in society are properly utilised but moral thinking may distract individuals from the benefits of working together – offering a clear *justification* to avoid interaction with the morally unworthy.<sup>93</sup>

**8.5.1** It may be retorted that individuals might mistakenly believe that they have non-moral, instrumental reasons to avoid cooperation with certain groups of people and that not all such social acts of condemnation have a distinctly moral edge. However, morality does provide a potential justification

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/20/weekinreview/caste-may-be-india-s-moral-achilles-heel.html> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-18394914>

<sup>93</sup> The problem of gender under-representation in science and engineering is a non-moral example of the problems associated with failure to utilise all groups in society in certain tasks. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/women-leadership-blog/2014/oct/20/women-science-engineering-under-representation>

that could be offered, for example, by members of the moral hierarchy who may pursue their own ends through such social division. In addition, if MA better promotes safety, prosocial behaviour and productive conflict resolutions post-vindication of MET compared to MP, then it is unlikely that most people would feel non-morally justified in supporting such a social division. Moral thinking can be a uniquely useful weapon for the moral hierarchy to deploy in support of social division, with the associated negative externality of this social division being the opportunity cost in respect of cooperatively promoting true beliefs.

**8.6** Moral thinking may also undermine the promotion of true beliefs in an educational setting. For example, if members of the moral hierarchy issued moral cues based on their own subjective tastes and sensibilities, then elements of the topic of sex and relationships may become *morally taboo* and not available for discussion in the classroom even when such discussions would be instrumentally helpful for students (and very likely society at large).<sup>94</sup> As a result of moral thinking that is informed by guidance from moral superiors, students may suffer the costs associated with misinformation, ignorance and false belief in this area of life. Without such moral thinking, educators would be faced with only a non-moral, instrumental reason to promote true beliefs amongst their students on the topic of sex and relationships.

**8.7** Members of the moral hierarchy may also issue moral guidance to the effect that it is morally wrong to question moral superiors or to undermine the statuses of members of the government or ruling classes. Specifically, normal people outside of positions of power may feel a moral compulsion not to challenge the messages that they receive through state-controlled media or not to engage in research themselves on issues that they might otherwise be tempted to question. Indeed, the example of North Korea suggests that it may even be considered a 'moral wrong' not to mourn the death of the leader of a

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<sup>94</sup> <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/section-28-returns-uk-schools-ban-promotion-gay-issues170813/>

country.<sup>95</sup> This level of morally backed political control would very likely undermine the promotion of true beliefs to a greater degree than would be the case in a more liberal, open society where individuals feel a greater freedom to pursue their own goals.

**8.7.1** This is not to say that moral thinking necessarily entails such a closed society, or that non-moral thinking necessarily makes a society more open and liberal. It is clear that even if moral belief was abolished post-vindication of MET, dictators might continue to hoard power through military might and control of resources. Obviously, we can also see from the modern world that moral thinking does not preclude the creation of an open, liberal society. However, to return to a point made by Hinckfuss (1987:3.6):

“Tyrants could, of course, still use fear to establish and maintain their position. Nevertheless, fear unaccompanied by moral charisma is a two-edged sword as many tyrants have found out to their cost when rebellion has finally broken out. Fear and moral constraints have different social consequences.”

As discussed in 9.5.4 in Chapter Five, morality is an extra protective weapon for a tyrant to deploy in order to boost their level of control over both ‘*hearts and minds*’. Thus, if moral thinking and acceptance of moral justifications are preserved post-vindication of MET, then tyrants and members of the moral hierarchy are in a stronger position than they otherwise would be if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET. Given this, the promotion of true beliefs is more likely to be undermined if morality is preserved post-vindication of MET because moral thinking can help to justify the orders and prescriptions of those who might seek to undermine the promotion of true beliefs in order to more reliably secure their own ends and goals; a dictator, for example, might not wish a people to gain knowledge of the items readily available to the general populations of other countries.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2085636/North-Koreans-face-labour-camps-upset-death-Kim-Jong-il.html>

**8.7.2** I accept that there may not be an overwhelming number of situations, in the real world as it currently stands, where moral thinking distracts individuals from the promotion of true beliefs. Moral thinking, for example, does not seem to typically stop or limit research into space travel, Formula One cars, movements in the stock markets or the life of Jane Austin. However, the victory for MA in this chapter is not pyrrhic either, for moral thinking can negatively impact the promotion of true beliefs in a non-trivial number of circumstances, both real and possible. Indeed, in the realm of science, moral thinking has acted as a distracting barrier to stem-cell research; a type of research that would very likely be better encouraged if moral thinking were abolished post-vindication of MET.<sup>96</sup> I am also reminded of a conversation with my Greek taxi-driver in Athens who refused to accept that ancient Greek men ever engaged in homosexual acts, as well as the decisions of the Victorians to hide and remove depictions of certain male body parts from ancient statues and works of art – these beliefs and actions were very likely supported by morally backed judgments regarding decency and indecency in both behaviour and art.<sup>97</sup> As a result of these judgments, true historical beliefs both presently fail, and historically failed, to be promoted amongst the population at large. Therefore, the negative impact of moral thinking upon the promotion of true beliefs in fields as diverse as science and history should not be underplayed, even if it should not be overplayed either.

**8.8** There are, therefore, a not-insignificant number of situations in which moral thinking is likely to undermine the promotion of true beliefs in a way that non-moral thinking would not. Moral beliefs can distract individuals in situations where, if morality was abolished post-vindication of MET, they would very likely recognise non-moral, instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs. This represents a serious cost for MP in the light of my conclusion in

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<sup>96</sup> The impact of moral belief upon the debate surrounding stem-cell research is evidenced in papers by Brock (2006), Marquis (2007) and Master and Crozier (2012) among many others.

<sup>97</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret\\_Museum,\\_Naples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_Museum,_Naples) – The Secret Museum is a section of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples specifically designed to hold erotic art from Pompeii that was locked away from view after excavation of the site. Efforts were made to ensure that knowledge of this aspect of ancient culture did not spread too far and many people (women, for example) were barred from viewing the objects for many years.

section six that moral thinking has no advantage over non-moral thinking in respect of promoting instrumentally valuable true beliefs. MA therefore shares the positive aspects of MP but does not share in the cost highlighted in this and the previous section due to the problem of moral distraction. On balance, therefore, in order to better promote true beliefs it is advisable to abolish rather than preserve morality post-vindication of MET. There is no need to play roulette with moral beliefs and to hope that moral thinking in a society aids the promotion of true beliefs rather than limits the promotion of true beliefs. Given the possible impact of the moral hierarchy and the evidence from the history of moral thinking, abolition of morality is desirable in this context.

## **9. Conclusion**

**9.1** I began this chapter by arguing that most people desire the promotion of true beliefs because true beliefs are very typically instrumentally valuable in respect of facilitating desire satisfaction – and far more typically instrumentally valuable than false beliefs. I also made clear that the respective structures of MA and MP as post-vindication of MET options did not entail the conclusion of this chapter in terms of which practice would better promote true beliefs generally.

**9.2** I next considered the MA-friendly argument from evidentialism before rejecting the idea that the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET would undermine a general commitment to evidentially justified belief formation. I also considered the MP-friendly argument from belief in moral reasons before highlighting the ways in which non-moral, instrumental reasons could promote true beliefs just as reliably as believed moral reasons could do so; for every helpful moral belief in respect of promoting true beliefs there would be a non-moral instrumental reason offering the same normative guidance (at least where the true beliefs in question were instrumentally valuable).

**9.3** Finally, I considered the argument from moral distraction and concluded that moral thinking can distract individuals from promoting true beliefs in a way that non-moral thinking would not. This claim was supported by the outlining of cases where instrumentally valuable true beliefs are not sought or shared because of morally justified thinking, perhaps shaped by members of the moral hierarchy and their subjective tastes and sentiments.

**9.4** On the basis of the above, I concluded that true beliefs (particularly of an instrumentally valuable type) would be better promoted by the abolition rather than the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET. With the conclusion of this chapter defended, the project undertaken in the second half of this thesis, as outlined in Chapter Four, now stands complete. Thus, on the basis of the conclusions from Chapters Five, Six, Seven and now Eight, I conclude that most people have defeasible, instrumental reasons to favour the abolition rather than the preservation of morality post-vindication of MET. This is because MA, rather than MP, better promotes the four key goods of safety, prosocial behaviour, productive conflict resolutions and true beliefs.



## Conclusion

The defence of MA and MET that I outlined in the introduction of this thesis is now complete. In Chapter One I outlined the target MET conclusion, briefly offered a defence of moral cognitivism due to Wedgwood (2007) and defended the claim that moral properties were necessarily mind-independent and categorically prescriptive.

In Chapter Two I defended necessary and sufficient conditions for the having of a moral experience. I argued that it is necessary and sufficient for an experience to count as a positive moral experience that a person experiences something – be it a person/act/object/state of affairs etc. – as being *non-institutionally categorically praiseworthy*. In addition, I argued that it is necessary and sufficient for an experience to count as a negative moral experience that a person experiences something – be it a person/act/object/state of affairs etc. – as being *non-institutionally categorically worthy of condemnation*.

In Chapter Three I argued that we should not accept the existence of moral properties, as defined in Chapter One, in the world. This rejection was not based on the idea that moral properties are necessarily ontologically problematic and nor was it based on the idea that moral properties could not sufficiently explain the moral data. On the contrary, moral properties were rejected because they failed to better explain the moral data compared to a more parsimonious purely evolutionary account and because moral properties are ‘queer’ in a way that is relevant to the decision regarding their ontological status.

In Chapter Four I set the scene for the defence of MA across chapters five to eight by outlining four personal and social goods against which MA and MP would be tested in order to determine which post-vindication of MET option better promoted goods that most people highly desired the promotion of.

In Chapter Five I argued that MA would better promote safety as a personal and social good than would MP. I argued that belief in instrumental reasons, properly framed by emotion and rhetoric, could just as successfully promote safety-enhancing behaviours as could belief in moral reasons. In addition, I highlighted ways in which moral thinking can actually make safety-relevant harms more likely.

In Chapter Six I argued that MA would also better promote prosocial behaviour than would MP post-vindication of MET. This argument was built upon the fact that human beings appear to be naturally altruistic and therefore do not stand in need of moral thinking in order to take themselves to have reasons to act for the benefit of others. In addition, I argued that the key mechanisms that affect levels of prosocial behaviour would not be significantly impacted by the abolition of moral belief. As in Chapter Five, I also highlighted ways in which moral thinking can undermine levels of prosocial behaviour compared to non-moral thinking.

In Chapter Seven I utilised the problems of moral approbation and moral distraction in order to make the case that MA would better promote productive conflict resolution compared to MP post-vindication of MET. In addition, I highlighted the possible negative impact of the moral hierarchy in this context.

Finally, in Chapter Eight I argued that MA would better promote true beliefs post-vindication of MET than would MP in virtue of eliminating distracting moral thoughts whilst maintaining the legitimacy of widely applicable instrumental reasons to promote true beliefs.

On the basis of the previous eight chapters I thus conclude that most people have defeasible, instrumental reasons to favour MA over MP post-vindication of MET. The conclusion of this thesis, in favour of both MET and MA, does not place me into a 'camp of one'. Others such as Mackie (1977) and Joyce (2001) have defended versions of MET, while Hinckfuss (1987) and Garner (2007 and 2012) have defended versions of MA. However, my defence of MET is different to that offered by Mackie in that I deny that motivational prescriptivity is necessary to the concept of a moral property and instead claim only that moral properties are necessarily mind-independent and categorically prescriptive.

In respect of future work, it is plausible that the 'queerness complaint' as utilised in Chapter Three in defence of MET may be of use to those who seek to argue against the existence of other controversial putative entities. If queerness is a legitimate complaint to be made against moral properties, then queerness may also be a relevant weapon to deploy in arguments against supernatural beings or other spiritual features of the world such as 'souls'; these are types of entities that might seem to be unique in unique ways. I do not here make any grand assumptions about the correctness of the application of queerness complaints in other settings but the complaint may well have utility in other debates.

In regards to my defence of MA across Chapters Four to Eight, I provided an analytic defence of the position that I take to be more refined than either the

defence of MA offered by Hinckfuss (1987) or the defence of MA offered by Garner (2007 and 2012). Specifically, in defending MA I drew upon resources from other academic fields in order to defend the general desirability, for most people, of MA post-vindication of MET. For example, in Chapter Six I cited the fact that most people are natural altruists in order to defend an MA friendly conclusion in the context of promoting prosocial behaviour. In addition, in Chapter Five I utilised evidence suggesting that non-moral thinking that is grounded in instrumental reasons can be at least as motivationally efficacious, if not more motivationally efficacious, than moral thinking that is grounded in apparently moral reasons – at least when those non-moral reasons are properly framed by either rhetoric or emotion. Both Hinckfuss and Garner were trailblazers for MA and their ideas remain extremely relevant to the arguments deployed in this thesis, but I hope to have significantly strengthened the case for MA and moved the debate further on over the course of this thesis.

Further, by focussing on the specific impact of MA and MP upon a diverse set of four goods that most people highly value the promotion of, my defence of MA is designed to be relevant to the interests of most readers with only extreme value outliers comfortably ignoring the conclusion in favour of MA as stated. In future work, the case for MA would be strengthened by further analysis of the impact of MA and MP upon other personal and social goods that are typically valued by most people – although this analysis will increasingly involve a focus on goods that are of less general appeal than those discussed in this thesis as the list of goods that nearly all people value will not be infinite.

In addition to the core defences of MET and MA within this project, the account of moral experience developed in Chapter Two opens up interesting future projects in respect of analysing just how many specifically moral

experiences people actually have in many varied and distinct settings of life (at least in the pre-abolition of morality context). Although I advocate the abolition of morality post-vindication of MET, it will be independently interesting to further understand how widespread moral experiences actually are – particularly temporally short moral experiences that may not always be recognised as being of such a moral character. Indeed, this data may throw further light upon the pragmatic benefits and pragmatic costs of morality in so far as moral thinking shapes the actions of people in contexts where the impact of moral thinking has hitherto not been immediately obvious.

Finally, it cannot be ignored that defending MA in theory and offering a route to securing MA in practice are two very different tasks. Having provided a theoretical defence of MA in this thesis by focussing on the advantages of MA versus MP as a post-vindication of MET option, it is incumbent upon the defender of MA in future work to make clear just how morality might actually be abolished in the real world. This might seem to be an especially significant challenge given the apparent entrenchment of moral thinking in our current context; general theoretical desirability for MA no more guarantees that moral abolition is possible than does general theoretical desirability for healthy eating guarantee that consumption of Big Macs or cream cakes will reduce over time.

While outlining a practical route to MA was not a task that could be undertaken within the confines of this thesis, I do take there to be good reasons for optimism regarding the possibility of putting the theory of MA into practice on a wide social scale. While the type of cultural shift that would be required to even allow MA ideas to gain traction in the real-world (i.e. non-philosophy seminar settings) might initially seem to be quite enormous, extraordinary cultural shifts have happened previously in history. The idea that atheism or homosexuality could become socially acceptable may have

seemed preposterous in the past but now these beliefs and practices are commonplace and socially acceptable in a great many parts of the world where they were, once upon a time, *illegal*. MA does not start from the position of being illegal and so actually has an advantage over atheism and homosexuality in this regard. Indeed, *miasma*-based discourse, once common, has now been all but eradicated as has *class*-based discourse in at least some corners of society.<sup>98</sup> Of course, the possibility of a cultural shift in general says nothing much about the possibility of most people rejecting their commitment to moral thinking in practice - but it does suggest that the possibility of promising future work in this area is at least plausible and worth consideration. Indeed, if my defence of MET and MA has done anything it should be to at least show that claims that may seem to be initially highly implausible should be given a fair and open hearing – such a fair hearing may result in some highly surprising discoveries and conclusions. Thus, theoretically vindicated, MA may yet be a plausible practical theory; certainly this is a project that requires further thought and attention in the future.

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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/techniques/miasmatheory.aspx> and [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/nickbryant/2010/01/the\\_classless\\_society.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/nickbryant/2010/01/the_classless_society.html)

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