

Moral Realism, Moral Belief

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–Draft–

Introduction

At the time of the 1986 Spindel Conference, William Lycan compared moral realism (in the eyes of most philosophers, though not his own) with believing in the Easter Bunny, and Jeffrey Sayre-McCord parodied the moral realist as someone who kept a copy of *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* hidden in the icebox, to be taken out for midnight indulgence in a ritual chant: “The Nazis were bad. The Nazis were *really* bad.”¹

Somehow, in the ensuing two decades, moral realism shed its crackpot reputation and went mainstream. Philosophers of the most varied stripes wanted to claim that they, too, were moral realists – though typically adding in explanation “quasi-realist”, “internal realist”, or “minimal realist”. Everyone seemed to agree that moral discourse has a *propositional surface* – it behaves grammatically just like any other area of property-attributing discourse, satisfies the Tarski schema, and indeed is fully integrated with other areas of discourse and reasoning. Increasingly popular *minimalist* theories of truth held that truth-aptness just *is* the existence of a suitably disciplined predicative practice, and increasingly popular *pleonastic* theories of

¹*Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1986), suppl. vol., *Proceedings of the Spindel Conference*.

properties held that properties are no more than “the shadow of predicates”. Insofar as the issue over moral realism is the issue whether moral judgments are capable of truth or falsity, or property-attributing, moral realism seemed to be winning “on the cheap”. Though, to be sure, there still seemed to be some far shore of “metaphysical moral realism” that was to be avoided.² The moral domain, it seems, needs to be understood as essentially *practical*, or action-guiding.

But if cognitivism is not the central issue, what is? Deciding that a discourse is apt for truth is still not making up one’s mind whether there *is* any truth to it – maybe it is all truth-apt hooey. But systematic “error theory” about morality has also lacked appeal.³ Even its most famous proponent, J. L. Mackie, had no sooner presented and argued for the thesis of error theory than he proposed a pragmatic replacement, capable of carrying out the same role in the guidance of human activity and advancement of human well-being, but devoid of any mythology about values “out there” in the world. Now, to the extent that the very stuff of morality *is* practical, rather speculative theoretical knowledge about “the furniture of the universe”, then even Mackie’s “error theory” begins to look like a kind of “social-constructivist realism” – rather like the view that “Shakespeare did not write all those famous plays and sonnets – they were written by someone else with the same name”.

A kind of minimalist realism appears to the “strange attractor” at the center of current

²What of the famous ‘is’/ ‘ought’ distinction, or the distinction between normative and descriptive concepts? Increasingly, consciousness grew that “normativity” is a highly general feature of discourse, even in the so-called philosophical “core”. Semantics is not just about how terms are used, but how they are *properly* used. Epistemology is not just about how we do form beliefs, but how we *should*. If cognitive status of normative discourse were inherently problematic, then a great many serious-minded philosophers will find themselves in the soup together. So assuring the cognitive status of a domain of normative discourse without heavy metaphysical entanglements becomes yet more compelling.

³A rare exception is Hinckfuss. Thanks to David Lewis for bringing this to my attention.

philosophical discussions in ethics. Can we carry this thought one step further – and show that even the “metaphysical moral realist” is drawn back into it? Consider the alleged contrast between “internal”, “lightweight” realism and “external”, “heavyweight” realism. If minimalist truth is just plain *truth* – and surely that is what the minimalist is claiming –, and if pleonastic properties are just plain *properties* – and surely that is what the pleonastic account is claiming – then even the superficially worrisome “external” doctrine carries no more baggage than self-styled “internal” position. The minimalist, seeking to represent the *objective purport* of our discourse, will argue that *calling* truth minimal does not mean denying platitudes like “Truth is correspondence to the facts” or “Truth is opinion-independent – merely changing our mind doesn’t change the facts”. But then these platitudes carry right over into moral truth. Struggle as he might to reach the supposed “far shore” of “metaphysical realism”, the over-wrought “external realist” can only achieve what it is already at hand once we have realism “on the cheap”. The only real alternative is that the minimalist is missing something about truth.

Perhaps that is part of what explains the widespread hesitancy philosophers manifest about assenting to moral realism *full stop*. The answer may lie in a sense that, however *objectivist* the surface of moral discourse, still, what lies behind it is a domain of judgment that is essentially *subjective* – and isn’t truth *full stop* objective? Moral objectivity, moral *facts*, it seems, are constituted by a kind of constrained subjectivity, not by a non-perspectival reality that is, to use a going phrase, “there anyway”. This seems deeply linked to the *practical* character of moral judgment, and the placement of morality under the heading *practical reason* while science remains under *theoretical reason*. The practical aspect seems in turn linked to the “normative” and “essentially contestable” character of moral discourse, and to the problem of keeping a lively

sense of why the practice of ethics, however disciplined predicatively, is still not a science akin to the disciplined predicative practice of empirical theorizing.

Internalism *versus* Externalism

About Moral Judgments

The central controversy, then, may not be over whether moral discourse is truth-apt, or even whether it contains significant truths, then, but over *how* this could be so given its essential involvement with subjectivity. This involvement is reflected in truisms associated with moral discourse that pose an obstacle to giving moral language a straightforwardly fact-stating interpretation.

The most important such truism, identified already by Frankena in the 1950's as the central source of meta-ethical contestation, is *judgment internalism*:⁴

The question is whether motivation is somehow to be “built into” judgments of moral obligation Here is an old and basic issue. It may be regarded as involved in Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s Idea of the Good It is different from, and to a considerable extent cuts across, the issues which have been discussed so much recently (intuitionism versus naturalism, cognitivism versus noncognitivism, ...). Indeed, I am

⁴We owe the term ‘judgment internalism’ to Stephen Darwall, see his, ref. Darwall distinguished judgment internalism from *existence internalism* – the view that a person *A* could have a reason to do or be *F* only if *A* possessed some actual or potential motive to do or be *F*. This notion of internal lies behind the “internal/external reasons” debate. So-called “neo-Humeans” have tended to lie up on the side of internalism on both fronts, and to see the two as interconnected; “anti-Humeans” have often split the two forms of internalism, defending judgment internalism while defending as well the existence of “external reasons”.

disposed to think that it is more basic than most of these other issues, since answers to it are often taken as premises for settling them⁵

Suppose that one takes to heart the existence of a *conceptual* connection between moral judgment and motivation, so that the very content of moral assertions somehow incorporates – though without *reporting* – the motivational state of the speaker, how then could such judgments display the “propositional surface” of ordinary fact-stating language, which has no such peculiar semantic tether to motivation? Several approaches suggest themselves.

One might claim that those who are not suitably motivated *misuse* moral concepts if they attempt to use them assertively.⁶ This must not be a merely pragmatic misuse, the way that I am not in a position to authorize you to borrow a neighbor’s ladder. Rather, it must be a semantic incompetence, a misuse that manifests failure to “grasp” the meaning of moral concepts.

Suppose, for example, I were to say, “Yes, I hear the sound plainly now”, when in fact I am deaf and using non-auditory cues – an oscilloscope reading, perhaps – to infer that a certain sound must be present. The phrase ‘I hear the sound plainly now’ has the most ordinary sort of truth-aptness and factuality, and what I say is “plain vanilla” false. But what *explains* its falsehood, given that I am indeed making an accurate, sensorily-mediated judgment of the presence of a sound? Some claims are such that, by virtue of their meaning, only those who are *exercising a certain sensibility* are in a position to assert them correctly. I would betray a kind of semantic incompetence with perceptual concepts if I insisted that I can “hear concert A as well as anyone”

⁵W.K. Frankena, “Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy”, as reprinted in Sellars and Hospers, p. 709.

⁶What follows is my attempt to state the so-called “secondary-quality” account of moral properties, as found in such writers as John McDowell, “Value as a Secondary Quality” and David Wiggins, “A Sensible Subjectivism?”. I don’t, however, wish to put words in their

because I can observe a cathode-ray tube trace of 440 cycles per second “as well as anyone”.

A second general class of internalist proposals takes a quite different tack. Rather than treat moral claims as plain vanilla true, they attempt to preserve the propositional surface of moral discourse while introducing a domain of primarily non-fact-stating, expressivist set of meanings “behind it” that *simulates* plain vanilla truth. Gibbard’s proposal here is perhaps the best-developed to date:⁷ to make a moral judgment is to express a distinctive kind of motivationally-infused mental state of *norm-acceptance*. The judgment does not report or describe one’s state of mind – such a claim could be plain vanilla true – but *signals* it, making the judgment fit to play a role within an up-and-running linguistic practice in which this sort of signal has a decision-and deliberation-guiding role. Mastering the concept involves a tacit understanding of this – one places a certain kind of conversational pressure on others and “takes a side”, for example, in making a moral claim. Thanks to the existence of a distinctive vocabulary for expressing such states of mind, complete with sincerity conditions, a discourse can function effectively in tasks of social co-ordination of action and attitude (e.g., gossip).

Of course, one can send a misleading signal. A hypocrite might be self-deceived, for example, about his own feelings. A liar might want to manipulate others by signaling feelings he does not even take himself to possess. Yet neither is making a *semantic* mistake in using the moral vocabulary for his expressive intent. By contrast, if I were to say to you, “Doing that would be quite inexcusable” when I mean only to report my opinion that I expect virtually everyone to blame you severely (though I myself am of another mind), then I have chosen the wrong words to express my communicative intent.

mouths, so the reader should take this restatement *cum granis salis*.

This second approach secures a necessary, semantic link between normative concepts and motivationally-infused states of speakers, but brings with it the challenge of explaining how such special linguistic forms could nonetheless behave in a fact-stating way – show the full discipline of a propositional predicative practice apt for “minimal truth”. This problem has become known as the ‘Frege-Geach problem’. Ordinary fact-stating discourse, for example, permits *hypothetical* reasoning, following such logical principles as *modus ponens*. After all, the primary function of such discourse is to express propositions, on a standard view, and these by their nature are constrained by propositional logic.⁸ How could a discourse that is not primarily fact-stating, but rather functions primarily to express motivationally-infused attitudes of norm-acceptance, manage to show a propositional surface?⁹ Norms and motives, after all, aren’t inherently disciplined by truth-functional logic. One possible response is to go “higher-order”. Appeal to a norm we have of holding ourselves and others to a certain discipline of “consistency” in what we permit or prohibit, favor or disfavor. We could see how such a norm would be fundamental to normative discussion and deliberation: “If you feel that way about *X*, then you should feel that way about *Y*, too. But you *don’t*. So now, what about *X* after all?” However now we just have one more normative attitude, not an “objective constraint”.

Each of these two internalist approaches – and there are of course others – has promise, but each also faces some recondite problems. Despite some progress, the Frege-Geach problem

⁷Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*.

⁸This is, of course, saying a mouthful. Propositions are abstract objects, and they “obey” truth-functional logic definitionally. If humans are able to express propositions and reason with them, this can’t be thanks to definitional relations among abstract objects alone. Somehow, we must succeed in having mental states that “of the right kind” to be attributed propositional content. See Hartry Field, “Mental Representation”, in Ned Block (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology*.

remains unresolved. Gibbard's original scheme, moreover, took for granted that semantic discourse – judgments about meaning – belongs to the fact-stating side of things. But once we entertain the thought that meaning itself is normative – the so-called “Kripkenstein rule-following problem” – then we would face the problem of formulating an expressivist semantics for semantics, and the problem becomes self-inflective. It remains to be seen whether these knotty issues for norm-expressivism can be untangled.

The first internalist strategy seems to face an equally formidable obstacle: as David Lewis pointed out, “the analogy between moral properties and secondary properties is not very good”.¹⁰ Secondary-quality terms are “rigidified” by “normal human sensory experience as it now is”.¹¹ Yet we'd hardly accept a comparable rigidification of moral discourse to “normal human moral experience as it now is”. Perhaps, for example, people can and should be much less vengeful. The moral question seems to be not how we *are* in fact motivated, but how we *ought* to be. For this reason, contemporary “sensibility theories” make the “conceptual connection” between moral concept and motivation not via what *produces* a certain response in us as we now are, under normal conditions, but what *merits* a certain response from us. Yet the latter is itself a normative notion. If secondary qualities enjoy objectivity thanks to their rigidification to a *factual* “norm of response”, then we cannot simply export this explanation to account for the objectivity of moral language, where the corresponding “norm of response” is normative. If we somehow try to avoid this by making the “conceptual connection” to our “way

⁹It may, of course, function secondarily to convey information.

¹⁰“Dispositional Theories of Value” symposium contribution, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (suppl.vol., 1989).

¹¹This remains somewhat controversial, but the claim is central to present strategies to infuse moral discourse with objectivity *via* the analogy with secondary qualities. See D. Wiggins, “A

of life”, we may secure objectivity at the expense of taking on an unwanted relativism.¹² Moral terms will have different meanings in different social “ways of life”, and we won’t be able to raise moral questions *about* ways of life.¹³

The difficulties faced by these two strategies somehow suggest a certain “incompressibility” of the problem of “normative force” – trying to build it into the meanings of a class of terms at the first-order then makes these terms themselves hard to fit into an objective propositional framework at the second-order. Normativity gets “pushed upstairs”.

Externalism about Moral Judgments?

One might begin to wonder whether the internalist truism is best accommodated as a *conceptual* truth.¹⁴ A worry arises: Would this amount to “demoting” moral judgment in a way that would fail to take seriously its role in regulating our practice? Doesn’t “taking seriously” require a conceptual connection – for otherwise moral concepts could be used without semantic

Sensible Subjectivism?” and Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone, ref.

¹²Of course, not everyone is unhappy with relativism about morality. Harman has always found it quite intuitive, and defended the adequacy of his account to actual moral practice. If he’s right, then there is no “special problem” about moral truth once we see the tacitly relational character of moral judgment. Neither is his view “revisionism about moral concepts”, since his thesis is not a view about concepts, but about the truth-makers of moral claims, understood normally.

¹³If rigidification belongs to the concept, there will be something in common to the terms – the rigidification-to-the-actual, and something different – different actualities. For further discussion, see Mark Johnson’s contribution to the symposium “Dispositional Properties” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* and P. Railton, “Red, Bitter, Good”, in the *European Review of Philosophy*.

¹⁴For example, a relativist may find a kind of *existence internalism* attractive – for agent *A* to have a reason requires that *A* possess certain (actual or potential) motives. This way a connection to motive is not part of the meaning of moral claims, but part of what makes them correct or incorrect.

impropriety even by someone who lacked corresponding motivation. But surely the role of moral deliberation as “action-guiding” is not merely “tacked onto it”. How could reason itself be *practical*, rather than merely *theoretical*, were the connection not conceptual?

Any “externalist” must explain how practical reason could be possible and moral discourse be suitably “normative”, without a special “intrinsic action-guidingness” built into moral concepts. How to show this? One approach would be to argue that the best explanation of practical reason and the truisms of moral discourse actually *requires* that core moral concepts not be “intrinsically action-guiding”. As a result, it would turn out that the very same concepts *can* figure in “merely theoretical reasoning” – this would be a feature, not a bug, of the account.

There may be no direct route for such an approach to follow, since it involves convincing us along the way that a certain account of moral practice is true-to-life and that it is relying upon a philosophically- and historically-appropriate notion of “practical reason”. Otherwise, the putative reconciliation of normative role and conceptual externalism will lack interest.

Let us say a word about moral practice first, and then spend some time on the question of what a historically- and philosophically-appropriate conception of practical reason might be.

Not all acute observers of the moral scene have claimed that the connection between sincere, linguistically competent moral judgment and speaker motivation is exceptionless, much less semantically necessary. Hume is sometimes portrayed as the father of judgment internalism, but it is far from clear that he holds it in a necessitarian, exceptionless form:

... morals have an influence on the actions and affections Morals excite passions and produce or prevent actions. ... [This] is confirm'd by common experience, which informs us, that men are often govern'd by their duties, and are deter'd from some actions by the

opinion of injustice, and impell'd to others by that of obligation. [T ref.]

And Judith Thomson writes:

The trouble is that there certainly *seem* to be people who from time to time believe they ought to do a thing without wanting, at that time, to do what they ought to do.¹⁵

Thomson is thus unsure even of the *truistic* status of judgment internalism, at least as a thesis about motivation.

Further, the externalist can point out that it is in general a notoriously difficult question in semantic theory which “truisms” or “near truisms” attach to a term by virtue of conditions of meaning or linguistic competence, on the one hand, and which by virtue of context, history, purpose, or shared attitudes and beliefs. For example, Grice and Strawson, in their response to Quine’s “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, claim that someone who said his three-year-old son “understands Russell’s theory of types” would almost certainly be factually in error, whereas someone who said his three-year-old “is an adult” would be making a quite different kind of mistake, a semantic error – *whatever* the facts might be about his son’s precocity, this person isn’t saying something that could be true.¹⁶

Grice and Strawson were writing before the recent revolution in biochemistry. Now that we have learned more about the regulatory mechanisms underlying growth and maturation, and about the possibilities of manipulating them chemically and genetically, we can in fact imagine being presented with a six-foot-tall, bearded, sexually mature male, attending University with a

¹⁵In her contribution to G. Harman and J.J. Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, pp. 117-118. In this passage, the point is being made in connection with a generalized “wanting to do as one ought”, though she claims that judgment internalism in its various forms is “a very strong thesis” and “at best dubious”. In my experience, many ordinary speakers of English would agree with her.

B+ average, yet born three years ago. With sufficient chemical intervention and computer-assisted learning, who knows what's possible – however desirable or undesirable? So, would it be a linguistic error to call *this* three-year-old an adult? An adolescent? The father seems to have a pretty appropriate way of expressing what to expect when he calls this three-year-old an adult. Our usage of terms like 'adult' and 'adolescent' took shape in a world in which developmental and chronological age were linked with a range of "normal progression" by natural conditions – but this range no longer appears so fixed. Put another way, we can see linkage between 'adult' and chronological age as a matter of overwhelming "normalcy" rather than "necessity".

Our "clear-case" descriptive use of terms 'adult' and 'adolescent' could thus be said to presuppose an empirical condition of normalcy, although we didn't notice this until recent decades. Moreover, our "clear-case" normative use of the concept of adult in law and morality has equally depended upon this normal linkage of the chronological and the developmental. It has "seemed appropriate" to confine the vote, drinking, and the ability to sign binding contracts to "legal adults" – those 18 (or 21) and older. After all, chronological age can be publicly ascertained, and by and large 18- or 21-year-olds have sufficient experience, autonomy, and judgment for their consent to count as *authorizing*, and to be accorded respect in a legal or political process. So we can see why a concept like 'adult' has come to play the central descriptive-cum-normative role it has in our lives. But once we confront the 3-year-old university student exemplifying "accelerated development and maturity", we face a quandry. What to call him? Must this person wait 15 (or 18) years before marrying, signing a binding

¹⁶H.P. Grice and P.F. Strawson. "In Defense of a Dogma", *Philosophical Review*.

sales contract, having a beer, or voting? What if it turns out that there are virtually no psychological complications and great practical convenience in speeding through the first three years of life? So that the “accelerated path” becomes the normal one – would it still “seem appropriate” not to enfranchise an ever-growing segment of the developmentally-mature working population, or to deny them either normative or descriptive title to adulthood?¹⁷ (I expect the question is moot: all these sophisticated young people would organize a social movement to extract enfranchisement from us, just as other politically disenfranchised groups have done in the past.)

All of this seems perfectly intelligible to me. But another point needs emphasis here, to forestall certain worries. Whatever we say about the *analytic* question of what is, or is not, “built into” the meaning of ‘adult’,¹⁸ this will not tell us how we must lead our lives or determine the franchise – for these are *synthetic* matters. As Kant argued, all practical imperatives are synthetic, not analytic. To be sure, semantic relations do underwrite some norms – specifically, norms for proper linguistic use. But “proper usage” cannot tell us whether to give the vote to three-year-olds, only whether it is appropriate still to speak of this as ‘adult franchise’.

Consider a term that is not our own. If we conclude that *honor*, as used in vengeance-based Mediterranean subcultures, is a term with “built-in” motive-expressive force, then we learn something about its proper use. It would be inappropriate to use the term simply to describe

¹⁷Grice and Strawson, for example, are confident that no matter what sort of “freak” your interlocutor produces, it will be a freak, not a *bona fide* adult. Yet *freak* is a notion tied to normalcy. If typically our universities came to be composed of students three-to-seven chronological years old, these individuals wouldn’t be freaks (whatever we might call them). Many social and economic developments have affected the rate of human maturity over the years, some quite dramatically, it seems. This does not make us all freaks.

¹⁸Or of ‘freak’.

someone's behavior. As a visitor, I might think that, knowing the kinds of men and women who are called *honorable* by most native speakers, I can easily just take up the term and apply it to the same people without implicating myself in any normative stance vis-a-vis their conduct. If I wish to distance myself from this value system, I must be careful to use term in “inverted commas” when I call behavior *honorable* – say, blood vengeance – that horrifies me. Moreover, this sort of conclusion is quite relevant to our task as translators – we had better not translate (or do so without warning our reader) original-language passages involving *honor* with an English term that can perfectly well be used with or without any accompanying pro-attitude. It should be clear, though, that making up our minds about the meaning or translation of *honor* is not making up our minds about how to live our lives. Similarly, making up our minds about the meaning or translation of English moral terms does not tell us how to live our lives – but only about how to speak of our lives, how to express our convictions, what it would take to translate these expressions appropriately into other tongues.

So let us now pass on to connect this discussion with the question of the nature of practical reason. Here I will need to ask for your patience, if I haven't worn it out already. For how else to show that one is operating with “a canonical conception” of practical reason except by appealing to the canon? I take the canon in the case of practical reason to assign a central role to Aristotle and Kant, so we'll have to have a look at these two figures. I don't mind – I have found what they say to be wonderfully illuminating. But you may find my presentation hopelessly schematic, or tendentious, or both. And I'm sure my commentator will be ready with the question, “So what?”

Aristotle

Let's begin with Aristotle. Sometimes philosophers speak as if what made reasoning practical was that its conclusion had a certain linguistic form, namely, 'I *ought to perform act A*'. But as Aristotle argued from the outset, the conclusion of a piece of practical reasoning is not a judgment, but an action-tendency, an intention:

the final step is the starting-point of action. [*De Anima* 433a16]

For this reason, he held that:

the intellect does not appear to produce movement without desire (for wishing [*boulesis*] is a form of desire, and when one is moved in accordance with reasoning, one is moved in accordance with *boulesis* too) [*DA* 433a22-25]¹⁹

Concerning the origin of motion involved in any action, he wrote:

Nor is the calculative faculty, which is called mind, the motive principle

[M]ovement is characteristic of one who is either avoiding or pursuing something. Even when the mind contemplates such an object, it does not directly suggest avoidance or pursuit; e.g., it often thinks of something fearful or pleasant without suggesting fear. It is the heart which is moved,– or, if the object is pleasant, some other part. [*DA* 432b30]

¹⁹'Wish' is the standard translation for *boulesis*, but this is recognized as potentially misleading. Contemporary English treats a 'wish' as something closer to a "daydream" or "hoped for" than an active action-tendency like "wanting". Yet *boulesis* is clearly meant by Aristotle to be a form of motivation or motive force (*orexis*) that tends to produce bodily movement. *Boulesis* is not, however, a mere urge or drive, but something closer to idea-mediated appetition, desire – *boulesis*, but not a mere urge, can figure in its own right in idea-based deliberation. In particular, it involves some positive representation – perhaps a mere appearance and mistaken – that the

And in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Now the origin of action (the efficient, not the final cause) is choice, and the origin of choice is appetite and purposive reasoning. ... [A]n action is an end in itself ... and the object of appetite. Hence choice is either appetitive intellect or intellectual appetite; and man is a principle of this kind. [NE 1139a32 - b5]

Further explanation can be found in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

As to purposive choice, it is clear that it is not absolutely identical with wish (*boulesis*) nor with opinion (*doxa*), but is opinion (*doxa*) plus motivation (*orexis*) when these follow as a conclusion from deliberation. [EE 1227a3-5]

Aristotle, then, gives us:

(A*) *doxa* + *orexis* + deliberation → decision [*prohairesis*] → tendency to act

Terence Irwin explains:

decision [*prohairesis*] ... is a desire to do something here and now, the action that deliberation has shown to be the action required to achieve the end. [NE notes, pp 392-93]²⁰

object of desire is a good, e.g., immediately agreeable (NE 1113b25-30).

²⁰Now some will want to insist that bringing in desire or *boulesis* is not incompatible with the idea that practical reasoning concludes in a judgment – for they understand desire itself to be a judgment, specifically, a judgment that a certain state of affairs is good. Aristotle does say that desire involves an “apparent good” in the sense that it “presents” its object in a favorable light (cf. NE 1112). But presentation as “apparent *F*” need not be an exercise of *judgment* – and Aristotle speaks of what is “immediately pleasant” as “appearing good”, a spontaneous tendency he warns us to “guard against” (cf. NE 1113a34). Color experience presents its objects as apparently colored red, green, brown, etc. But this is not “judging red”, “judging green”, etc. – indeed, color appearance typically *guides* color judgment. In the ordinary case, of course, I judge to be red what I see as red – what “strikes me as red”. In an unusual case, I may know that I am

Prohairesis, Aristotle writes, is the “deliberate desire of things in our power” [NE 1113a10].

Of course, not all action is *deliberate*, according to Aristotle. We can, given opinion and desire, act or select “in a flash” – especially if the case is urgent or familiar (cf. EE 1226b2-4). If I’m an experienced cook and I want a good pot for the next dish, I can select “according to opinion and desire” in an instant. This is intentional action, and action for a reason, but not an exercise in deliberation. Sometimes, however, a task or goal presents us with no obvious means, or with no path that has, as yet, a clear margin of pluses over minuses. Then we must deliberate to arrive at a more or less settled opinion about which is a good or sufficient or optimal means to the end – deliberation, according to Aristotle, is always concerning means, not ends (NE 1112b12). The upshot should be *prohairesis*, decision, but that is not simply a settled belief that such-and-such is a means is optimal for the situation. I could form that belief *hypothetically*, without ever being in that situation, or without being moved to pursue that end or means.

Decision ... is not wish [*boulesis*], though it is apparently close to it. ... Nor is it belief. ...
... [w]e decide to take or avoid something good or bad. We believe what it is, whom it benefits and how; but we do not exactly believe to take or avoid. ... [T]hose who make

in non-standard light and need to “guard against” erroneous color attributions based upon spontaneous color appearance, e.g., looking for a red car under the sodium lights of a parking lot at night. In this circumstance, I might need to judge a car *to be* red that *looks* brown. Now this “looking brown” cannot be constituted by judging it to be brown – for that I certainly don’t do, even preliminarily. At least, if I remain aware of the non-standard lighting. For further discussion, see P. Railton, “Kant rencontre Aristote là où la raison rencontre l’appétit”, *Philosophiques* (2001).

the best decisions do not seem to be the same as those with the best beliefs; on the contrary, some seem to have better beliefs, but to make the wrong decisions because of vice.

We can agree that decision follows or implies belief. But that is irrelevant, since it is not the question we are asking; our question is whether decision is the *same* as some sort of belief. [NE 1111b20-1112a13]

It looks as if the cognitive or doxastic states involved in decision could in principle exist without the upshot being an intention, i.e., without practical reason occurring. But then the conceptual *content* of the cognitive or doxastic states involved in decision could in principle inhabit other forms of reasoning, e.g., theoretical reasoning.

One might have thought that *if* the conclusion of practical reasoning is a judgment of the form ‘I ought to perform act *A*’, and *if* practical reasoning concludes in an action-tendency, then the only way to combine these two thoughts would be for an action-tendency somehow to be “built into” the ‘ought’. Aristotle’s alternative is that the practical deliberation always involves in its preconditions, premises, or background a motivational element (NE 1112b), so that finding a motivational element in the conclusion is no surprise – but then the conclusion is *more* than an “intellection”. As Aristotle say, it is “appetitive intellection”, “intellectual appetite”, a “deliberated desire”.

Hume is famously associated with the idea that an intention is a “belief-desire pair”, and the neo-Humean “externalist” account of practical reasoning looks remarkably similar in structure to (A*), above:

(H*) belief + desire + deliberation → intention

Let us call the shared structure, with its mutually-irreducible elements, (*) for short:

(*) doxastic state + motivational state + inference → intentional act-tendency

This account is today widely criticized as “impoverished”,²¹ as unable to explain the distinctive “normative force” of practical reason, in contrast to “richer” Aristotelian or Kantian conceptions.

We’ve looked briefly at Aristotle, let’s turn to Kant, who I believe *shares* the (*) picture, and indeed gave us a compelling way of spelling it out and explaining its peculiar phenomenology. If schema (*) is paradigmatically “externalist”, then the “canonical account” of practical reason would seem – thus far, anyhow – to leave room for “judgment externalism”.²²

Kant

Kant seems to have believed that intentional action always involves an appetitive susceptibility in “the faculty of desire” as well as a representation of action in thought:

Every determination of choice proceeds *from the representation of a possible action to the deed through the feeling of pleasure or displeasure [Lust oder Unlust²³]*, taking an

²¹It is over-simplified, leaving out such crucial factors as *attention* and *arousal*. It is only a schema of a core part of deliberate, intentional action. And, of course, most intentional action is not the upshot of deliberation or practical reasoning, so the “inference” element, while involving quite complex cognition, is not an act of “practical deliberation” in the classical sense.

²²*Existence internalism* remains untouched. Indeed, something like the generic model (*) is often used in arguments for it. One view about *practical reasons* for action is that they should be understood as reasons that could actually have action-guiding *force* for the agent, and that could play a causal-explanatory role in intention-formation (cf. Bernard Williams, “Internal Reasons”). The generic model helps explain why the existence of such reasons for an agent depends upon whether the agent has, or could come to have, suitable motivation. (Williams appears to me unnecessarily to restrict ways of “coming to have suitable motivation” to “sound deliberative routes” for the agent.)

²³‘Pleasure or displeasure’ are not entirely happy translations of *Lust oder Unlust* – they refer not

interest in the action of its effect. [*Metaphysics of Morals* 6:399]

Action in accord with practical reason, moral action, is not free of *Lust* and desire, but rather involves a specific sort of desire – the “moral feeling”, which is a “natural predispositio[n] of the mind (*praedispositio*) ... on the side of *feeling*” (*MM* 6:399):

Moral feeling. This is the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty. [*MM* 6:399]

It is this “antecedent disposition” that permits the judgment that an action accords with duty to *engage* us subjectively on behalf of an action, to feel an incentive to do it, thanks to the normal operation of the “faculty of desire”:

The *faculty of desire* is the faculty to be, by means of one’s representations, the cause of the objects of these representations. ... [*P*]leasure or *displeasure*, susceptibility to which is called *feeling*, is always connected with desire or aversion [*MM* 6:211]

The faculty of desire works with and through “representations” that may be the result of understanding and cognition:

susceptibility to the representation is called *feeling*, which is the effect of a representation (that may be either sensible or intellectual) upon a subject and belongs to sensibility, even though the representation itself may belong to the understanding or to reason. [*MM* 6:212n]

so much sensory pleasantness as to “gusto” or “spirited interest”. *Lust* should not be confused with the English *lust*, which has a distinctive linkage to sexual appetite. Both words share a root, however, the same root as the archaic English *list*. A good translation of *Unlust* might be “listlessness”. The general idea here is what psychologists call “incentive salience”. Anticipated sensory pleasantness is just one way of feeling an incentive or liking for an idea or image. But basic category of human affect that can directly arouse positive interest and motivation – including *admiration* or *affection* – can function here.

Here then is a picture of practical reason at work in the case of duty:

(K*) representation (cognition of the deed as meeting an objective condition) + motivational susceptibility (moral feeling in the faculty of desire) → incentive for/motivated interest in the deed under the objective representation

What if the objective representation occurred without the susceptibility? Wouldn't the individual lay under an obligation to *act from duty* nonetheless? That would be impossible:

There are certain endowments such that anyone lacking them could have no duty to acquire them. – They are *moral feeling, conscience, love of one's neighbor, and respect for oneself (self-esteem)*. There is no duty to have these because they lie at the basis of morality, as *subjective* conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty, not as objective conditions of morality. [MM 6:399]

Putting the elements of understanding and motivation together, Kant writes:

In all lawgiving ... there are two elements: **first**, a law, which represents an action that is to be done as *objectively* necessary, that is, which makes the action a duty; and **second**, an incentive, which connects a ground for determining choice to this action *subjectively* with the representation of the law. [MM 6:218]

He explains:

By the first the action is represented as a duty, and this is a merely theoretical cognition of a possible determination of choice, that is, of practical rules. By the second the obligation so to act is connected in the subject with a ground for determining choice generally.

[*ibid.*]

So it must be possible, within the Kantian picture, to have a “merely theoretical cognition” of the

status of an act as objectively required or forbidden. That is, to carry out theoretical reasoning with the normative concepts “morally required” or “duty”.

What is this like? Consider the application of the “contradiction in conception” test of the categorical imperative. This can be done purely theoretically, by someone with *or without* the moral feeling. However, if such a “merely theoretical cognition” is to be *practical*, then it must be “taken up” by a subjective “ground for determining choice generally”, namely, “the faculty of desire”. That is, it must be possible to have a desire whose *immediate* object is “accord with the moral law”, which embodies a *direct* affect toward such accord, regardless of any other inclinations or incentives one might face.

Respect (*reverentia*) [“for the law, which in its subjective aspect is called moral feeling” – 6:465] is, again, something merely subjective, a feeling of a special kind, not a judgment about an object that it would be a duty to bring about or produce. [MM 6:402] A judgment of duty is not reverence, then. To be sure, without judgment, respect for the moral law would be hopeless as moral guide on its own. This “merely subjective”, non-judgmental attitude is not, Kant emphasizes, a “moral sense”:

It is inappropriate to call this feeling a moral *sense*, for by the word “sense” is usually understood a theoretical capacity for perception directed toward an object, whereas moral feeling (like pleasure and displeasure in general) is something merely subjective, which yields no cognition. [MM 6:400]

Moral feeling, as an exercise of the faculty of desire, translates *affection* (not a cognition or judgment, but an affect) for a *representation* (an idea that is the result of an act of theoretical perception or understanding) into an *appetitive pursuit* (a *Wille*) of the act represented by the

understanding. A dutiful person is *frustrated* (Kant's "practical pain") if she cannot carry out her duty, *pleased* (Kant's "practical pleasure") when she can. But the pleasure and frustration here cannot serve as an independent or "heteronomous" *guide* for her action, for she is susceptible to them only *after* she has determined theoretically the application of the moral law *given* her feeling for that law:

The state of *feeling* here is either *pathological* or *moral*. – The former is that feeling which precedes the representation of the law; the latter, that which can only follow upon it. [MM 6:399]

Thanks to this direct susceptibility, which neither supplies nor requires an independent judgment of the representation, an "objective cognition" which itself owes *nothing* to motivation can be directly translated into a "ground of action" (*Bestimmungsgrund*). Thus, someone possessing the moral feeling can be attuned (*Stimmung*) in action to a perfectly objective ground (the categorical imperative test) in such a way that failure to meet it is experienced subjectively as a *practical constraint* and *duty* – one will be frustrated and dissatisfied with oneself (i.e., experience "practical pain") if one fails to act in accord with it.

... any consciousness of obligation depends upon moral feeling to make us aware of the constraint present in the thought of duty, there can be no duty to have moral feeling or to acquire it [MM 6:399]

For this constraint to be practical, it cannot be merely theoretical cognition, or judgment that a duty obtains:

For, conscience is practical reason holding the human being's duty before him Thus

it is not directed to an object but merely to the subject (to affect moral feeling by its act), and so is not something incumbent on one, a duty, but rather an unavoidable fact [Tatsche]. [MM 6:400]

Without the moral feeling, one would be without the “receptivity” that permits a judgment of duty to be practical, i.e., *in fact* a constraint upon an active will. However well one could perform the categorical imperative test, one would remain “morally dead”. Thus the only duty with regard to moral feeling is to “cultivate it and to strengthen it”, so that its practical force is enhanced to the point that it enables one to resist the pleasure-promising blandishments of “antecedent inclination”. Our duty could not be – *per impossibile* – to acquire it from scratch by an operation of the understanding (MM 6:400).

I hope, via this shameless appeal to authority, to have made a case that a “factorizable” model of intentional action:

(*) doxastic state + motivational state + inference → intentional action-tendency

is a perfectly *generic* model of practical reason at work, as much Aristotle’s and Kant’s as it is Hume’s. This is so even in the special case of Kantian autonomous (moral) action.

Recall that the problem for moral realism was supposed to be how a species of cognitive, fact-stating judgment could be *practical*, or action-guiding. The suggestion was that this could be accounted for only if action-guidingness could somehow be “built into” moral concepts and therefore *intrinsic to* a species of purely cognitive “practical judgment”. But if Aristotle and Kant are taken as model theorists of practical reason, they would, I believe, reject the idea that action-guiding, practical judgment is “purely cognitive”, as well as the idea that it deploys *concepts* that could not be the object of theoretical belief, without practical upshot. The concepts

that figure in the doxastic states involved in practical reason do not contain the motivational origins of rational action, then, and are apt for “merely theoretical reasoning”.

Even what is perhaps the most impressive contemporary attempt to defend the objectivity of practical reason, Thomas Nagel’s *Possibility of Altruism*, does not attempt the impossible. He begins his story with prudential motivation, in words echoing Kant’s remarks about the “moral feeling”:

The issue is not whether prudence exists, but over its analysis: the analysis both of prudential motivation and of the conditions for the presence of prudential reasons. It is obvious that people are prudentially motivated and do care what will happen to them; someone who remained totally unmoved by the possibility of avertable future harm or accessible future benefits would be regarded as wildly peculiar by anyone [PA 37]

Neuropsychologists have identified individuals who appear to lack prudential motivation, who reason well about their interests and yet proceed to behave in contrary ways without qualm, often leaving their practical affairs in shambles and their actions seemingly inexplicable. At least some such individuals have been found to have a physical disconnection – a *lesion* – between the areas of the brain concerned with calculation and the areas represented in emotion and feeling.²⁴ They can encounter a situation involving risk, for example, and arrive at an accurate assessment of relative risk, while not experiencing the physical fear – arousal, sweating, etc. – that ordinary people do, and that helps us both to detect risk and to avoid it once discovered.²⁵ They echo Aristotle’s observation, cited above, concerning the motive force in action:

²⁴See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*.

²⁵Damasio et al., “Deciding Advantageously Before Knowing the Advantageous Strategy”, *Science* (1999).

Nor is the calculative faculty, which is called mind, the motive principle

[M]ovement is characteristic of one who is either avoiding or pursuing something. Even when the mind contemplates such an object, it does not directly suggest avoidance or pursuit; e.g., it often thinks of something fearful or pleasant without suggesting fear. It is the heart which is moved, – or, if the object is pleasant, some other part. [DA 432b30]

Our basic desires, on the account suggested above, drawn from Kant, just *are* practical susceptibilities to certain doxastic representations. Basic desires prior to such representations, not “downstream” from them, but *derived* (what Nagel calls “motivated”) desires often are. The moral feeling in Kant is a direct susceptibility “on the side of feeling” to certain representations, so, too, Nagel’s “prudential motivation” is a direct susceptibility to representations of one’s own interest. *Given* prudential motivation:

Reasons are transmitted across the relation of means and ends, and that is ... the commonest and simplest way that motivational influence is transmitted. No further desires are needed to explain this phenomenon, and moreover, attempts to explain it in such terms are bound to fail. [PA 32]

Thus, if I am prudentially motivated and driving on the Interstate when the electronic traffic advisory suddenly flashes that an accident has occurred 4 miles ahead, I immediately look for the next exit and take it – no “desire to save to time” or “desire to take the next exit” or even “desire to take the most efficient means to my end” needs to mediate this. The phenomenology here is that of “acting on the latest information”, i.e., on *belief* – I immediately *trust* the sign and expect delays on the road ahead. But the phenomenology does not involve “seeking a desire as a condition for action”. On Kant’s view, if I am morally motivated, I have a motivational

susceptibility to a doxastic representation of an act as in accord with – or contrary to – the moral law. This representation is attainable, he argues, via a perfectly objective test, e.g., the “contradiction in will test”. If Kant *trusts* himself to have carried out this test on a given possible act-description – making a lying promise to repay a friend, say, which flunks the test – and thus *believes* the resulting representation of the act, he doesn’t need to “seek a desire” as condition of action, though he may have to struggle with contrary inclinations.

Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for whatever might come to pass in it, I ask myself only: can you also will that your maxim become a universal law? ... Here it would be easy to show how common human reason, with this compass in hand, knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty ... [G 403-404]

Thanks to the “moral feeling”, then, “common human reason” can be practical on behalf of objective duty.

Enough, already. Why?

One advantage of knowing that Gilbert Harman will be commenting on this paper is that I can be sure he’ll ask – and probably has been thinking for quite some time – “*So what?* Aristotle and Kant might have had these views, but they wrote years ago, before modern psychology was born. Unless you can give me some *philosophically principled* reason compatible with *empirical psychology* to believe this ‘generic model’, all this is strictly of exegetical interest – if that. I

thought you were going to tell us why *we* should think your sort of moral realism had any credibility.”

Quite so.

A Principled Reason?

I will be arguing that the *content* of a moral judgment, if such a judgment is to express the “normative attitude” even the internalists take it to express, must be compatible with the “factoring” of the generic model. That is, the semantic content of moral belief must be objective and straightforwardly amenable to use in “merely theoretical reasoning”. Put another way, the “Frege-Geach problem” is not part of the problem, it is part of the solution – it follows *directly* from the primary nature of the core normative concepts of morality that they permit *plain vanilla* “moral belief” and hypothetical reasoning.

Let us ask what is involved in plain vanilla belief employing “merely descriptive concepts”. And let us take an example of a “primary quality” with familiar objective standards, so that you won’t suspect me of any funny-business: length, spatial extension. Since Wittgenstein himself draws upon the metaphor of a “measuring-rod” to explain the “normative” character of logical rules, we at least have a canonical antecedent [*PI*, sect. 131]. Since our terms *norm*, *rule*, and *regulate* all come from terms for builder’s measuring instruments, we at least have etymological authority.

In the well-known Muller-Lyre illusion, two line-figures are presented to a naive subject, who is then queried as to which horizontal line, if either, is longer:

1. ⟨—⟩
 ⟩—⟨

The usual, immediate response (when the figures are properly drawn!) is, “The lower line is longer.” Would the subject like to try measuring? Yes, he would, and a ruler is supplied. To his surprise, the two horizontal lines measure as equal in length. After a few more efforts to check the measurement more carefully, the subject realizes that he was fooled by an “optical illusion”. That is, he *defers* to a measuring-rod as a standard of comparison for length, even though – indeed, in part because – he recognizes that the rod is a fixed, objective measure, independent of “how things look” to him.

To be sure, his use of the ruler itself involved no *further* consultation of a fixed rule. That is, he made his observation against marks on the ruler with *unaided* eyes, and he *assumed* that the ruler stayed rigid when shifted from one line to the other. So even his “ruler following” involved subjective perception, not judgment submitted to test against a “fixed rule”. Could it have been otherwise? Suppose another ruler had been brought in to apply and check the first. But now he follows the second ruler thanks to unaided “subjective” vision and unquestioned “subjective” trust. Were one unwilling ever to allow a first-personal subjective attitude of *default deference* to guide one’s judgment, one could never make *any* judgment, much less an objective one.

Suppose our subject has applied the rule, deferred to this measurement process, and pronounces the lines equal in length. Is it any part of the content of what he asserts that he is *expressing* this confidence? Doesn’t he simply assert that the lines are equal in length, full stop? To be sure, in the normal conversational context, assertion *expresses* belief, and belief is a

subjective attitude of trusting expectation. Moreover, assertion *makes a claim* of authority, and *places a conversational pressure* on others. When others *trust* him, they will *defer* to his authority and treat his assertion as a *reason* to believe, as *evidence*. But all of this normative activity takes as its content, its focus or object, a perfectly objective representation of the lines as equal in length, the very thing *we* come to believe if, trusting his assertion, we “take his word for it”. Note, again, that trust cannot in general be a “judgment of trustworthiness”, on pain of regress. For in trusting his assertion, I trust my understanding of what he said, trust my sensation, trust my faculties. On pain of regress, this *default trust* cannot depend upon a prior judgment of trustworthiness – how could I judge that without trusting myself? Nor is default trust directed only at oneself. When an infant comes to trust its mother, it acquires just this sort of default trust. Woe unto the child if he or she cannot acquire trust in another without making a “judgment of trustworthiness”.

Consider now my 13-year-old son, who desperately yearns to be taller. This is a subjective aspiration on his part, but it is an aspiration toward an objective condition – *really* being taller. In assessing his aspiration’s progress, he defers to a “fixed rule” – unaltered by his hopes and dreams: a series of marks made on a door frame. Returning home from summer vacation in September he “feels a lot taller” than he did in June. He even “looks taller” to himself and others, because the summer’s activity has slimmed his hips and face, and squared his shoulders. It is with considerable excitement that he straightens himself against the door frame to have his progress recorded. If wishing could make it so, the new mark would fall a full inch or more above the old one. But the “fixed rule” on the doorjamb is oblivious to his racing heart. “Wow! A good quarter-inch,” I report hopefully, marking and dating the pencil line in the usual

way.

He is crushed. But it follows from the *content* of his aspiration – to *be really taller* – to be crushable in just this way. For he *does* defer to the measuring apparatus as more authoritative than his personal sense of things. He is using that door jamb “measuring-rod” *normatively*, revising his opinion to fit it rather than revising it to fit his opinion – painful as this is.²⁶ Moreover, we respect his opinion as a length-of-body judgment accordingly. If he settled for “looking a lot taller” when he stared at himself in the mirror, then if we heard him telling his grandfather over the phone, excitedly, “Boy, have I grown over the summer!”, we’d wink at each other (and later explain to Grandad that, alas, his grandson hasn’t *really* grown very much, though he can expect him to “look taller” when he sees him next week).

In these humdrum cases of length assessment we see in play two elements of “rule following” – an external, independent, objective *standard or rule*, and an internal, deferential, subjective *following*. What explains this deference to something so insensitive to one’s own opinion is precisely the *content* of what we wish to say or be, and what our words and acts will express. A ruler or a door-jamb embodies no proposition and makes no assertion. But I can use them to guide my assertions if I defer to them as an objective standard. If, that is, I *trust* the standard, my senses, and my mastery of language and measuring procedures. Kant’s “moral

²⁶He further shows the objective character of the object of his aspiration by understanding the question, “Hmm. I wonder if maybe the door-jamb has swollen with humidity over the summer, and isn’t giving us an accurate reading?” He would understand, and defer to, more accurate standards of physical extension if they could be supplied. Thus, “Let’s see what you measure at the doctor’s office when you have your appointment next week – they measured you last spring, and have one of those metal things for testing height.” When he gets to college, he’ll show the objectivity of his conception of physical extension when he learns – rather than rejects as “inconceivable” or “a misuse of terms” – that it is space-time intervals, not spatial intervals, that are invariant.

compass” of the categorical imperative test similarly makes no assertion and commands no action in itself. But I can use it to guide my moral assertions if I defer to it as an objective standard. The beliefs about duty at which I thereby arrive have perfectly objective content, even if in asserting them I would *express* (what else?) my trust in this test – a subjective, affective attitude that guides my action-tendencies and expectancies. I can further use it as an objective guide in action, and will “feel its force” to the extent that I *aspire* to do my duty and trust this test of it.

Here is the structure of the situation, as I am imagining it.

Beliefs are subjective attitudes of expectancy that are mediated by trust in a representation with sufficient content to support inference. If my son trusts the door jamb standard as a measure of objective physical magnitude, or Kant trusts the “contradiction in conception” test as a measure of perfect duty, that it is a belief. My son would be surprised if the door-jamb standard indicated considerable growth and yet his old jeans still fit. Kant would be surprised if a maxim flunked the contradiction in conception test and yet seemed to him, and almost everyone else, perfectly OK. Each can *express their subjective trust* in assertion, but the content of the assertion will be a *trust-independent*, objective state.

Desires are subjective attitudes of wanting that are mediated by liking of a representation with sufficient content to support inference. If my son desperately desires to be taller, or Kant has the “moral feeling”, that is a desire. My son will be disappointed and frustrated if his trusted test shows he has not grown much during the summer, pleased if it shows he has. Kant will be disappointed and frustrated if he realizes that an act he has performed flunks his trusted test of duty, pleased if he re-analyzes the case and finds that it passes. They can *express* this desire

practically, by their acts, if they can succeed in acting “for the sake of” its objective content.

My son can act “for the sake of growing taller” when he responds favorably to my suggestion that he take his multivitamin daily – even though he dislikes its taste and generally is counter-suggestive on matters of nutrition. Kant can act “for the sake of duty” when he drags himself next door to apologize to an ill-spirited neighbor once he realizes that his angry action toward her flunks the contradiction in conception test when considered in a calmer moment – even though he hates the prospect of admitting guilt to her, and she will never let him hear the end of it. Each will, of course, feel some real satisfaction if they succeed in carrying out these acts. That is the signature of desire. But of neither will it be true that they “acted for the sake of pleasure” because their action is attributable to desire. On the contrary, they “acted for the sake of an objective end”, thanks to the objective content of the representation contained in their beliefs and desires. In succeeding, they were “pleased with themselves”, but only because they believed themselves to have succeeded at attaining meeting a *desire-independent, objective* standard. The standard they trust permits their belief to have objective content and their action – in taking the vitamin or apologizing to the neighbor – to *practically express* an objective commitment.

Now in fact, I don’t agree with Kant about the categorical imperative test. Like Kant and almost everyone else, I have moral beliefs. But I have more confidence in consequentialist standards than in a formal test of conception or willing like the categorical imperative. Kant and I don’t differ, so far as I can see, over the *meaning* of “duty” or “morality”. When I assert that some of the acts that Kant thinks his test precludes would in fact be “morally correct” or

“permissible”, I am *expressing* my distrust of Kantian standards and my trust in non-Kantian standards. But this trust and distrust are no more a part of the content of what I assert than they are of the content Kant asserts, and I take issue with. Because the content we disagree about is a common subject matter, one amenable to hypothetical reasoning of the most ordinary sort. Thus I can say:

If duty requires that one never take one’s own life, then voluntary euthanasia is impermissible. But it isn’t.

And Kant can say:

If duty permits treating another as a means alone, then slavery is permissible. But it isn’t.

Kant and I accept the same content when we accept the first element of these sentence-pairs, and we express a disagreement in belief when we, respectively, assert or deny the second element. The argument form we use is straightforward propositional logic, and neither one of us disputes its propriety.

Kant and I both aspire to objectivity and truth in our moral beliefs. We seek objective criteria and standards. We look to moral practice and our ordinary “moral intuitions” for evidence, but do not defer uncritically to everything we see, hear, or feel. We also seek to *hold ourselves* to these objective criteria and standards in belief and action, in much the same way that my son *holds himself* to an objective standard of length. That is our aspiration. Rob any of the three of us of the objective content, and we cannot have that aspiration, or express it in word and deed.

Coleridge, Thoreau, and P.O.D.

Let me finish by considering three more cases of objective aspiration that are – thankfully? – not drawn from the moral realm, but drawn from real life. In all three cases, I think we can be confident that we are dealing with competent speakers as well as individuals of sincere and credible judgment.

Let me begin, though, with a very vague general reflection on “value discourse”. Everyone knows there’s something “subjective” and “reactive” about value that distinguishes it from “plain facts”. It would fly in the face of obvious truisms to maintain, for example, that a person’s well-being has nothing to do with what she does or could intrinsically enjoy, or that morality has nothing to do with what contributes to human or sentient well-being,²⁷ or that aesthetic beauty has nothing to do with the forms of delight available through sensory and cognitive engagement. Value depends upon these questions, and therefore on lots of “plain facts” about enjoyment, sensation, cognition, etc. But lots of “plain facts” do not depend at all on these “subjective reactions”. “Plain facts” don’t have to supervene on anything, but value by its nature must *supervenies* on “plain facts”, mediated by reactive features of subjects. But value judgment, and evaluative practices, have an *objective aspiration* as well. What is going on?

Bertrand Russell famously remarked:

I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find

²⁷Does Kant think morality concerns well-being? His full view is that it is a condition on the status of moral reasons as *genuine practical reasons* that happiness be the upshot of moral virtue in individuals and societies. If morality is supposed to be “pure practical reason”, then morality would be no more than an illusion or “high-flown fantasy” were the moral life not also a life of human well-being. Recall again that the faculty in which the “moral feeling” and the will are located is the faculty of desire, and desire is for Kant necessarily involved with *Lust* and “practical pleasure”.

myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it.²⁸

Russell feels in his philosophical bones the *objective purport* of judgments of moral wrongness.

The view with which he is taking issue is *subjectivism*, the idea that, say, wrongness judgments somehow *report* dislike, and so have dislike as their content. No one we have been discussing holds *that* view. Indeed, subjectivism is the bane of the *expressivist*, who is forever being mislabeled “subjectivist” and must repeat over and over that she *agrees* with Russell, and that moral judgments definitely *do not* report likes or dislikes. For the expressivist, moral judgments function primarily to *express*, but not report, subjective, affective attitudes.

Now I agree that moral judgments typically do express, without reporting, subjective, affective attitudes. But on my view, the attitude expressed need be no more than the *trust* of belief – theoretical moral judgments are perfectly possible. And I would certainly disagree with the expressivist that this attitude has any involvement with the *content* of what is judged. Thus the *primary* of function of moral judgments is neither to report *or* express subjective, affective attitudes – it is to state a fact. Now the facts in question are normative or evaluative facts, and they supervene on non-normative, non-evaluative facts. But like many supervenient subject-involving features of the world, e.g., psychological dispositions, they are themselves as plainly factual as you please.

Value discourse, as I understand it, aspires to objectivity about a supervenient, subject-involving domain, to state plain facts about it with plain concepts. Such discourse acquires its *action-guiding* or *appreciation-guiding* role thanks to how enduringly important facts of this kind

²⁸Cited in Wiggins, “A Sensible Subjectivism?”, p. 185.

are to human life. The “normative facts” with which the “normative domains” of prudence, morality, aesthetics, and epistemology are concerned supervene on features of life that have been a central preoccupation of humans since time immemorial, and have been the objects of the most vigorous study and debate throughout recorded history. They show no signs of fading. “Getting at the truth” or “being objective” in such domains matters because getting the facts straight about such enduring human concerns matters.

Let us now turn to aesthetics. Consider two visitors to the recent Frank Stella show in New York. Stepping back out into the street, one says, “I don’t know much about art, but I know what I like, and I *don’t* like that.” “Well, I *hated* it,” the other chimes in. Her friend is intrigued. “Wait, you’re supposed to be an expert on modern art, and Stella is a big name. Are you saying this stuff wasn’t any good?” She replies, “Well, for better or worse, I *do* know a lot about modern art, God knows, and take my word for it, that’s *not* good work. It’s way below Stella’s earlier work.” One is retreating from aesthetic judgment while inviting it, the other is accepting the invitation to judge. One withholds judgment, the other asserts it, aspiring to objectivity.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the great metaphysical poet, explains in his ode “Dejection” the profound character of his psychological depression – “A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear”. He writes, of the racing clouds on a windy night as he walked through a familiar woods:²⁹

Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew

²⁹I’m grateful to David Hills who, commenting on a paper I had written in aesthetics, suggested

In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;

I see them all so excellently fair,

I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

Coleridge is an astute and experienced judge of beauty, and knows that his depression has done nothing to rob such a sky of its beauty. So his aesthetic judgment of it remains quite intact – he can *see* that the night is beautiful – though it leaves him feeling only empty and cold. He cannot *appreciate* it.

If he experiences no “appreciative response”, how can he claim sincerely to be judging that it is beautiful? Aren’t aesthetic judgments “appreciation-guiding”? That is indeed a role that they play – a role, and a *responsibility*, that Coleridge takes deeply to heart. Coleridge’s depression has shaken neither his trust in ordinary perception, nor his confidence that he has mastered aesthetic concepts. He has no doubt that this sky is beautiful – he knows that from long experience prior to his depression. He knows, too, that this wild night sky possesses to a high degree *beauty-making features*, the features upon which beauty supervenes, also known to him from long experience. For Coleridge, as for the rest of us, part of what is understood when the concept of beauty is mastered is that true beauty, if it exists, *merits* the response of appreciation, whether or not it in fact receives it. Thus, in the conversation after the Stella show, the expert tells the disappointed neophyte: “This show *merits* your dislike. Take my word for it.”

Appreciation is the *prima facie (default) appropriate affective response* to beauty, just as fear is the *prima facie (default) appropriate affective response* to real threat.³⁰ As Aristotle

that I read this ode.

³⁰I won’t usually include the ‘*prima facie*’ or ‘*default*’ in what follows, but it should be understood. Even beauty sometimes isn’t sufficient for a work to merit appreciation, all things

notes, a brave man is not fearless, but one who feels “the right amount of fear”. Coleridge knows a beautiful sky when he sees it, and knows that, were he in his proper mind, he would manifest an appreciative response – walking under such a sky would be for him an intrinsically rewarding experience. But when he calls it ‘beautiful’ or ‘excellently fair’, he is not saying anything about his own actual or future appreciative states. He is saying that it *deserves* appreciation, and he sees that. Thus is in no way hypocritical or misleading in calling it beautiful, even though it leaves him cold.

Coleridge might, however, feel a tad hypocritical or deceitful if, to reassure his eager host that he is enjoying his visit to the countryside, he were to exclaim upon returning, “Ah! *Such a marvelous sky!*” For given the normal use and context of this sort of language, his host would naturally think that Coleridge was expressing an experienced enjoyment of the fine sky. But – alas! – he didn’t enjoy it. Who knows what he’d say to spare his host’s feelings as he returns from his walk and encounters the cheerful question, “Did you have a good walk?” But if he were a stickler, he could say, without linguistic impropriety, “Oh! It is truly a beautiful sky. But my despondency is so deep that it leaves me cold as a stone. I care not for it – alas!” Typically, judgments of beauty have the “conversational implicature” that one is experiencing actual enjoyment, which one might wish, for example, to share and urge upon others. Coleridge’s

considered, and threat isn’t sufficient for a situation to merit fear, all things considered. My claim is that grasping the concept of fear involves understanding it is a reaction whose “proper function” is to attune us to threat, so that “excessive fear” is not “too much fear for someone of your size” (the way “excessive weight” might be), but “fear out of proportion to the threat you face, or have evidence of facing”. When Roosevelt said, “We have nothing to fear, but fear itself” he drew upon this “quasi-analytic” connection – his audience could understand that his remark “was a way of saying” that the only real threat we faced [to economic recovery] was our own attitude, which was out of proportion to any other threats. This was no mere “conversational implicature” of his remark, but the core of its very purport.

remark would, if made without qualification, convey to the hearer that he is experiencing such a state. “The meal was delicious,” we say, by way of answering the question, “Did you like it?” But there is no contradiction in saying, “The meal was truly delicious – take my word for it as an experienced chef who has prepared this recipe many times and helped prepare it tonight – but this darned cold meant I couldn’t really taste it, much less enjoy it.” Communication of actual appreciative enjoyment is something aesthetic judgments *do*, though they do not *say* it. They do this, and have the prominence they do in our shared aesthetic practices, *because* they purport to be objective – the chef is telling you how it really was with the meal.

Coleridge is confident about *this* sky, but he also takes his capacity to see beauty or make aesthetic judgments *in general* to be *impaired* by his loss or normal appreciative responses. Suppose we were to transport the still-depressed Coleridge to a landscape unprecedented in his experience – Arizona, say – hoping to revive his spirits. “There,” we say, pointing to a saguaro desert under a turquoise sky and brilliant sun, “Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?” He shrinks from responding. Depressed, he has stopped trusting his immediate appreciative responses as an aesthetic guide – after all, he knows that even an “excellently fair” sky left him cold. So the fact that he finds this desert scene quite unmoving does not seem to him good *evidence* that it is aesthetically valueless or *merits* indifference. Moreover, lacking as he does any previous experience with desert landscapes, or knowledge of relevant beauty-making characteristics, he cannot even make a confident inferential judgment of beauty. Most likely, he will simply beg off. “Sorry, you’ll just have to excuse me. This sun is very bright for my English eyes, and I’m afraid I have altogether lost confidence in my reactions. Perhaps I will come to see the beauty in this desert and sky, but you will have to give me time.”

Now the expressivist aesthetic philosopher who would build the expression of appreciative feeling into the content of aesthetic judgments will say, “Aha! You see, there *is* an appreciative force in there after all. For on the starry night he *deferred* to himself as an aesthetic guide – he *claimed authority* concerning whether it *merits* appreciation. When he experiences no such self-ascription of normative authority, as in the Arizona desert, he finds he simply can’t make an aesthetic judgment. And surely you’re not going to say that self-ascription of normative authority concerning merit is a ‘non-attitudinal’ state!”

How could I? But which attitude is it? And, especially, is it an *appreciative* attitude? I would say that the attitude is simply the self-deference of *trust* and the feeling of *expectation* exhibited in belief, and therefore in assertion generally. If you ask Coleridge the time, he will take out his watch, look at it, and say “Nine-thirty”. He is claiming a certain authority, trusting his understanding of what you said, trusting his perception, trusting his watch, trusting his command of English, and commending to you to share – even accord authority to – his opinion concerning the correct time. Moreover, he takes himself to have *evidence* that *merits* belief, and wouldn’t be asserting the time to be 9:30 otherwise, since assertion is the expression of sincere belief. He thinks, too, that trust on your part would be an appropriate response to his assertion. But the content of his assertion, like the content of his belief, is that the time is 9:30, nothing more or less – nothing about trust, evidence, etc.. He would be incompetent in English if he did not understand these norms of assertion.³¹

³¹We can understand the norms of assertion as arising from the need for a practice in which we can be useful to each other in talking about the objective world by expressing subjective belief attitudes – so long as certain norms are observed. Although these norms can be expected to arise wherever speakers are to be found, I doubt that we should understand them as “built into” the semantic contents of the objects of belief. For then we’d be talking in part about our attitudes

Coleridge asserts that the sky that night in England is starry, with clouds and a moon. He also asserts that it leaves him cold despite its great beauty. With both remarks, he invites you to take his word for it. He *trusts* his understanding of the word ‘beautiful’, and therefore trusts as well its “quasi-analytic” entailment – the sky *merits* appreciation. He asserts, too, that the sky that day in Arizona is bright and sunny, and trust its “quasi-analytic” entailment – the appearance of the Arizona sky *justifies* the belief. He asserts that this bright sky leaves him cold, and that he is in no position to say whether or not it is beautiful. He won’t assert, then, that his lack of response is *evidence* of lack of beauty – because he doesn’t believe it. He’s inviting you to take his word for how he feels, but not to take his word for whether it is beautiful. He would

rather than the common, objective world. This would, for example, render problematic the truistic feature that the full truth conditions for a belief that *p* are the same as the full truth conditions of *p*. Indeed, it would give us the Frege-Geach problem for belief and assertion. Most importantly, it would mistake what we *do* when we assert with what we *say* in our utterance. Suppose, for example, that I am a contextualist skeptic and you ask me the time. Officially, I do not trust that there is such a thing as time. Officially, too, I think that the context of ordinary discourse permits me to use my sense of the watch’s reading to assert that it is 9:30. I will answer, then, “The time is nine-thirty”. What did I say? I said, simply, that the time is 9:30. Suppose you say, “Aha! Trapped you! You’re officially a skeptic, yet you’ve just said that you *trust* that time is real!” You reply, “Not at all. I said, ‘The time is 9:30’. This will be true, and I will have spoken truthfully, just in case that *is* the time, whatever my epistemic theory, or yours. I certainly said nothing about trust. My skeptical contextualist epistemology *licenses* me to assert that the time is 9:30 in *this* context without acontextual or fundamental trust that time is real. Moreover, it licenses me to assert *in this context* any and all the logical implications of ‘The time is 9:30’. Of course, ‘The time is 9:30’ *implies* nothing about my psychological attitudes – it does not even imply my existence. You might think I’m being misleading, since you’re thinking of what trust I’d express – what authority I’d claim – concerning the reality of time in *other* contexts. Focus instead on what I *say* here and now: ‘The time is 9:30’. Of course, what I *did* in saying that expressed my particular epistemic norms.” “But you’re changing the meaning of the words ‘time’ and ‘is’,” your critic returns. You reply, “Not at all. I mean by ‘time’ and ‘is’ what you do. Where we differ is in our *epistemic norms*, norms which function to *license sincere assertion*. You seem to think that I am not entitled to assert that it is 9:30 unless I think I would be entitled, given my evidence, to do so in *all* contexts of inquiry. But we can have our discussion about all these matters using the English words ‘time’ and ‘is’ in just the same way. Indeed, I’d be very surprised if you thought that epistemic norms, relevant contexts of inquiry,

assert, of the sky that English night, “It ought to be appreciated” or “There is excellent reason to appreciate it.” And, knowing you and trusting your judgment as far as he does, he might assert, “There may well be excellent reason to appreciate this Arizona sky.” Thus far, his use of English and of the words ‘beauty’, ‘ought’, and ‘reason’ strikes me as impeccable, even though he has not expressed *appreciative* attitudes, but only the attitudes involved in sincere belief and assertion quite generally, including default self-trust in ordinary perception and language competence.

To be sure, we have aesthetic practices in the first place because we are capable of having, and sharing, certain feelings – appreciation, delight, enjoyment, disgust, boredom. Assertion of aesthetic judgment thus plays a role in this practice in the guidance of appreciation – if someone you whose taste you really *trust* tells you “You simply must see this movie – it is really wonderful”, you will take yourself to have a reason to see it, and likely want to. Acquired knowledge of beauty-making characteristics also plays a role in this practice. “Somehow, we’ve got to improve the aesthetics of this hallway – for a start, we could stand some more visual variety” or “I’ve never seen that part of New Jersey myself, but I’ve often heard my roommate describe it, and I can tell you, do *not* expect the view from your hotel room to be a vista of aesthetic delight.” Normally, we are able to judge novel cases directly, by attending to our appreciative responses without considering a check-list of “beauty-making characteristics”, and no doubt we would be at a loss to provide a perfectly general theory of beauty-making features. Yet we have excellent knowledge of some of them, and in familiar contexts there’s no reason to hesitate about using this knowledge to make aesthetic judgments, as Coleridge might do in judging a starry sky in Arizona, despite his unfamiliarity with the landscape and his lack of any

and norms of assertion were any part of the *meaning* of the words ‘time’ and ‘is’.”

appreciative response to it.

Coleridge manages to believe that the starry sky – in England or Arizona – *merits* a response thanks to the “quasi-analytic” truism that that which is beautiful is such as to *prima facie* merit aesthetic appreciation. This is, in effect, why we put ‘beauty’ in the category of *normative concepts* – it is a concept mastery of which involves understanding this sort of “analytic” connection. The two visitors to the Frank Stella exhibition manifested this master when they contrasted dislike with badness. And even a perfect aesthetic skeptic can properly draw upon it to argue his case:

If anything *is* beautiful, then everyone of reasonable sensitivity and rationality *ought* to appreciate it intrinsically.

I can tell you from experience that people of great sensitivity and rationality do not converge in their intrinsic appreciation, and never will – they’ll disagree about this eternally. Taste is just too variable at the most basic level.

Ought implies *can*.

So there isn’t really anything beautiful.³²

This hypothetical appearance of the term ‘beauty’ carries the same meaning and “quasi-analytic” entailments as ‘beauty’ in Coleridge’s categorical assertion that the starry night sky really *is*

³²This argument may call to mind Mackie’s argument for an “error theory” about morality. Contrast Hume’s sensible knave. He thinks the truth conditions for moral claims can be met, but has no “moral feeling”. Therefore he cheerfully acknowledges (in private!) that his acts are unjust, his character knavish. “Fortunately,” he observes, “this equips me very well for my work – I swindle people and card shark for a living, and am much better at deception than most, since my emotions do not betray me.” The psychological study of certain forms of sociopathy shows the existence of personalities quite similar to this, and such individuals are excellent at casual deception for just this reason, passing the “Ekman tests” for lying easily – they do not show the characteristic emotional conflict (e.g., instantaneous facial grimacing) most of us do when lying,

beautiful, and therefore the same implication concerning what people of great sensitivity and rationality could normally expect from it. If there are some sensitive and reasonable people at his host's home that windy night in England – people who, unlike Coleridge as he now finds himself, *could* be alive to its beauty – then he will think they *ought* to come out and see the sky, and *should* appreciate it. If there is beauty in the Arizona desert under the sun, then Coleridge thinks he *ought* to be able to sense it, too, once he's gotten more familiar with the landscape and come back to his right mind.

If the 'ought' or 'merit' that is analytically associated with 'beauty' is *not* "essentially appreciation guiding", what good is it? Coleridge shows us. It has a *normative* role to play. To *guide* actively is to have a causal power, not a linguistic one. A normative concept purports to state a condition for *correct* guidance. What causal force does this correctness condition have *in itself*? – None, causal relations are synthetic, not analytic. Where does the force come from if not from the concept? It comes from a causal feature of the agent, a susceptibility to beauty. Coleridge confers upon himself the authority to pronounce on the English night sky even though he does not feel this force, because he trusts that his susceptibility is impaired, and trusts as well his memory of past skies. For him, then, 'beauty' judgments lack appreciation-guiding *force*, but owing to his trust they have *expectation-guiding* force concerning the responses of those whose susceptibility is intact. He thus believes his unappreciative attitude is "not as it should be", it is a violation of a correctness condition. Correspondingly, he does not believe that his indifference has the status of evidence of lack of beauty, rather, it has the status of evidence that he is failing to respond correctly even to "excellent" good aesthetic reasons, reasons to appreciate. *That is*

for example. Damasio's work suggests one way this might be so.

why it is such a profound testimony to his depression, and what depression is robbing him of. His ode manifests *normative belief* on the question of beauty – what Kant called a “merely theoretical cognition” – but also *desire* to be rid of this deadening state.

He is, then, frustrated to be failing in this way. That, too, is a causal effect calling for a causal explanation. In addition to his normative belief, he has other, logically independent attitudes and beliefs. He believes that aesthetic appreciation has been one of the most enjoyable and sustaining experiences in his life – that his life is pale and sad without it. Unlike a philistine who mistakenly thinks all this “aesthetic appreciation” stuff is a lot of snobbish pretense, Coleridge knows that it is just plain enjoyable, even exhilarating. So, even depressed as he is, he still *likes the idea* of experiencing aesthetic appreciation, and *wants* to be able once again to experience it. “But what can I do? It seems so hopeless? If only” Because he believes that the sky is beautiful and merits appreciation, he is frustrated, despairing, feeling profoundly deprived.

Now, suppose a modernist aesthetician come onto the scene. She sees Coleridge’s sky and says, “Rubbish. Stars and clouds and moons aren’t the stuff of beauty. Beauty is perfection in form, like Lewitz’s white cube structures or Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram Building. Beauty abstracts from the inessential, the sentimental. You’re right not to appreciate this sky.” She trusts that she knows the meaning of the word ‘beauty’ as well as anyone, and she takes herself to be genuinely disagreeing with Coleridge’s judgment. That could not be so if ‘beauty’ *meant* “possessing such-and-such beauty-making characteristics”.³³ For she doesn’t disagree with Coleridge at all about whether the starry night possesses the non-normative characteristics

³³This argument may call to mind Allan Gibbard’s defense of “norm-expressivism” in response

Coleridge attributes to it – she disagrees about whether these features make for beauty, i.e., merit the term. She would not be disagreeing with Coleridge, however, if she thought that ‘beauty’ meant “possessing formal perfection”, for then she would have to say that Coleridge is simply misusing the term, and really talking about something else. According to the modernist and Coleridge, ‘beauty’ is a normative concept – they hold conflicting beliefs about whether this sky truly *merits* appreciation, about whether indifference to it could be *justified* by its aesthetic features.

But if the modernist does not believe that Coleridge is misusing the term, then what does she think about Coleridge’s claim that he *ought* to appreciate this sky? Is Coleridge right or wrong to say this? The modernist answers: “That is what Coleridge should say – he is merely following a quasi-analytic entailment of his beauty-attribution, so this is mere consistency on his part – , but in saying it he is making a mistake on the facts. He believes something consistent but false.” Is Coleridge correct in his appreciative response to the sky? The modernist answers: “Coleridge’s indifference is the correct appreciative response – he’s right about that, so to speak – but he’s wrong to distrust it. It’s too bad he can’t learn much from his indifference in his current state. His depression makes him think that he can’t use his appreciative responses as any kind of evidence, but maybe this is the beginning of his true enlightenment – disillusion with a faulty aesthetic.”

Coleridge fights back. “I stand by my judgment. Formal perfection may contribute to beauty, but it is not the whole of it by any means. You ought to think that Hayden is superior to Mozart, or that the French Academics are superior to Courbet – in both cases the one is more

formally perfect, more abstracted from sentiment, than the other. But I'll bet you don't think either one. Or, if you do, I'll bet that you don't really *feel* it. You're too sensitive to find Hayden more thrilling than Mozart."

But surely, Coleridge must think that his modernist interlocutor *ought* to appreciate Mozart more than Hayden – so why does he say the opposite? Coleridge is making a hypothetical use of 'ought', roughly, "If consistent, you would think this". And Coleridge does this precisely in order to put pressure on his interlocutor's claim about the nature of beauty – for he is confident that anyone of reasonable sensitivity will in the end find more to appreciate in Mozart, however much Mozart departs from formal perfection. Does Coleridge think, "If I were my interlocutor, let me appreciate Hayden more than Mozart"? No, he thinks, "If I were my interlocutor, let me *appreciate* more what I *believe* inferior, and learn from this tension the error of my ways." That is, Coleridge thinks about the modernist the same sort of thing the modernist thinks of her.

Coleridge, of course, thinks of himself the same way. He worries that, depressed, he might come under the sway of some radical formalist aesthetics. He thinks, of that future self, "Let him believe what he thinks fit, but *don't* let this stifle his capacity for appreciation of Mozart – let there be *some* hope of retrieving him." Similarly, he thinks, of his current, depressed self, "My appreciation is stifled, but at least my judgment has not deteriorated as much as my sensitivity. So let me be guided in belief and assertion by memory and judgment, not by my current appreciative feelings, when they conflict."

On this account, there is an attitude of normative aesthetic belief distinct from a psychological state aesthetic appreciation, and normative aesthetic assertion does not have its

primary function the *expressing* of such a state. Isn't there a "semantic connection" between normative belief and appreciation? Yes, normative aesthetic concepts truistically entail correctness conditions for appreciation – but do not express its occurrence. The space for "normative guidance of appreciation" is to be found just in this gap – *between* trusting an aesthetic judgment and feeling aesthetic appreciation. That, for example, is the space someone who is "trying to learn about music" is working to bridge. She may trust various aesthetic authorities about what is good music, and she is "working" at listening to music, making discriminations, attuning herself to things that will bring her appreciation in line with this trust. Because she *believes* the music authorities, she *expects* to be able to do so. Such normative guidance could not occur were there no such space, since it would simply be impossible for her to trust the authorities without possessing the appreciative response.³⁴

Similarly, it would compromise the crucial evidential function of aesthetic appreciative response in *guiding* and *correcting* mistaken aesthetic belief if such appreciation were "constituted" by belief or judgment – aesthetic belief would be too "self-confirming". If it is a truism that whenever *x* is beautiful it is an appropriate object (other things equal) for aesthetic appreciation, it is equally a truism that appreciative responses are evidence for aesthetic judgment – "The proof of the pudding is in the eating". Now 'evidence', too, is a normative concept, truistically connected with what one ought to believe or judge. This means that judgments of evidence have as part of their content an idea concerning what ought (other things equal) to be

³⁴This gap also means that there is a constancy in content across uses of 'beauty' or 'meriting appreciation' in aesthetic discussion. Whether the use be hypothetical or categorical, third-, second-, or first-personal, it has the same meaning. If part of the content of aesthetic belief were a special "appreciative content" necessarily linked to the feelings of the speaker, this would be problematic – witness the "Frege-Geach problem" and the problem Harman raises about

believed. But experience can *function* to make belief *responsive to evidence* (a causal notion) without being *judged* evidence. Thank goodness! For this is an important avenue of learning and correction.

The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau lays out in his journal an elaborate and unqualified scheme of values, celebrating ‘Nature’ (capital ‘N’) and castigating the folly of surrounding humanity’s “Saint Vitus’ dance” of work and “improvement”. He singles out the railroads for particular criticism:³⁵

The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvement, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps ... and the only cure for it as for them is a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that that is essential that the *Nation* have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*, who will build railroads? ... But if we stay home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. ... And every year a new lot [of rails] is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon.³⁶

When an enormous, fresh railway cut passes close to his cabin, one could expect Thoreau to be

including “affective content” in pain beliefs in *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, p. 53.

³⁵Stephen Railton brought these passages to my attention, for which I am most grateful.

³⁶*Walden*, pp. 2035-2036 in the *Norton Anthology*

appalled aesthetically, politically, and morally. But he picked up the habit of taking this rail line as a short cut for walking to town. Instead of spending all his days “as deliberately as Nature”, it seemed, he was sometimes in a hurry. In any event, he somehow held his aesthetic nose sufficiently to take this rail cut. But it had a curious effect on him, not one predicted by his theory of going “to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life”, of “elevating purpose”, and “lov[ing] the wild not less than the good”:

Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the village, a phenomenon not very common on so large a scale, though the number of freshly exposed banks of the right material must have been greatly multiplied since railroads were invented. [*Walden* 2048]

The thawing of the sides of the cut produced:

a truly *grotesque* vegetation, whose forms and color we see imitated in bronze The whole cut impressed me ... [t]he various shades of the sand were singularly rich and agreeable, embracing the different iron colors, brown, gray, yellowish, and reddish. ... True, it is somewhat excrementitious in nature, and there is no end to the heaps of liver lights and bowels, as if the globe were turned wrong side outward; but this suggests at least that Nature has some bowels [*Walden* 2049-50]

He tells us that this scene was ‘beautiful’, and full of the highest aesthetic ‘excitement’. Yet – was it the product of Nature working her course untrammelled by “external and superficial” human activity? Was it purposeful or deliberate, or wild? Was the railroad “riding” Thoreau, or was he riding a crest of aesthetic appreciation thanks to being “tripped up” by the sorts of

“improvements” humans effect?

To Thoreau’s credit, he does not fail to see the beauty of this eviscerating scar, so external and superficial, exposing Nature’s bowels. He theorizes it as “Nature” in his own way – it is the *natural* character of the sand flow that makes for the beauty, he claims:

You may melt your metals and cast them into the most beautiful moulds you can; they will never excite me like the forms which this molten earth flows into. [*Walden* 2050]

But he is forced to a conclusion uncomfortable for his early, simply dichotomy of “the wild and the good”, on the one hand, versus “improvement and waste” on the other: “There is nothing inorganic” (*Walden* 2050). Thus he shows that aesthetic appreciation may operate without the official permission of aesthetic judgment. His attention was arrested by the banks before he judged them, they fascinated him inexplicably before he understood the nature of their beauty. He came to *feel*, and then to *see*, that there are more beauties in heaven and earth than he had dreamed of in his philosophy. If his “aesthetic sensibility” is to “track the truth” about what is beautiful, or merits appreciation, then his actual appreciation had better not be hostage to normative judgment.³⁷

We see in all this two *a priori* features of normative aesthetic judgment. First, it has an

³⁷We see a similar phenomenon of experience “correcting” or “undermining” judgment in the moral case when empathy, for example, leads someone to extend humane treatment to another despite holding normative opinions that would license contempt or cruelty. A number of Polish police officers, under the direction of occupying Germans in World War II, were instructed to shoot a group of Jewish prisoners individually. Some found that they just couldn’t bring themselves to do it without experience violent nervousness and upset. This was so even in the case of some police officers who were anti-Semitic, and who did not make a principled critique of the Nazi program. The Nazis for their part had to develop more impersonal and less individualized techniques of killing in order to avoid triggering empathetic effects – even in SS Corps members. See A. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* for discussion and relevant psychological literature.

objective purport – it seeks to *attune* aesthetic judgment to objective features, such that Thoreau “speaks for all” when he judges beauty, and does not say, “It’s just sand – but I like it”. One’s own likes and dislikes are as much a possible target of aesthetic correction as anyone’s.

Coleridge no doubt thinks that were he to come to like the grand canvases of French Academic painting more than Chardin’s diminutive studies of water-jugs, his judgment would – alas! – have become *degenerate*. (And unless, of course, I’m wrong – a possibility I cannot rule out, however confident my current opinion – I concur.) Second, it is supervenient. The ground for any difference in aesthetic judgment must be some non-normative, objective feature. For anyone to be *fully* equipped for excellence in aesthetic judgment, then, non-normative, objective features must be both *appreciation-guiding* and *judgment-guiding*, with neither one constituting the other. I must be equipped, that is, with a *susceptibility* to the influence of non-normative, objective features that could *attune me* to aesthetic value. In order for the beauty of a scene to explain my judgment that the scene is beautiful, the beauty-making features must be able to cause me so to judge it. Ordinarily (but not always, as Coleridge’s case shows), this is done by direct influence upon my appreciative responses.

The “generic model” that I attributed to Kant and Aristotle (and that is widely attributed to Hume), which allows us to factor the component mental states of rational action into a cognitive element³⁸ and a logically independent affective/conative state,³⁹ thus seems to me to

³⁸Really, as we saw, a *doxastic* element (cf. Aristotle’s *doxa*), since it involves both a cognitive representation and the doxastic attitudes of *trust* and *expectation*. That is, the cognition is a belief, not a bare “cognitive representation of a proposition”.

³⁹A state which is not a mere cognition or doxastic state, but which may contain a cognitive representation and involve such doxastic attitudes as trust and expectation – as we saw in the operation of the Kantian “faculty of desire” (cf. also Aristotle’s *boulesis*, which requires an idea as well as liking and appetite).

have a perfectly generic rationale, witnessed in *a priori* principles of normative discourse and quasi-analytic features of normative language.

Grasp of these *a priori* features of aesthetic language is a very basic feature of our shared aesthetic practice. Let me close with the example of a remark my thirteen-year-old made the other day. He had played a song for me, *Youth of the Nation* by P.O.D. (“Payable On Death”, though I didn’t know it at the time), asking me what I thought of it. Turned out, I liked it. He printed out the words from a website and we read them together. I liked the words. So we both “liked the song”. “It’s my favorite,” he told me, enthusiastically. As a parent, I was glad that I, too, liked his favorite song. (This isn’t always so!)

A day or two later, he observed while we rode in the car, “You know, that is the *one* song I like that it doesn’t bother me that you would like.”

“Oh?” I asked, inviting explanation.

“Well, usually it would bother me if you liked a song I like. But *Youth of the Nation* is a *good* song, with *good* words and *good* music. So I’m actually *glad* that you like it.”

I realized that I would have let him down if I hadn’t like it – not as a father who indulges his son’s peculiarities, but *aesthetically*, in my own voice. I realized, too, that he was actually taking my liking as some evidence that he was responding to the song’s *goodness*, not just its novelty or shock value. For him, like all of us, music is a badge of identification as well as an aesthetic phenomenon. As a teenager, he *needs* to find music that I don’t like, but which he enjoys or can come to enjoy. Too much overlap in our tastes would bother him, make him suspect his taste wasn’t really his own, that it was insufficiently autonomous, cool, oppositional,

daring.

But he also thinks that some of his preferences are explained as *merited* by the aesthetic qualities of certain pieces of music – the really, truly *good* ones. These show he’s not just some dumb kid with no taste who just gets jerked around by trends, peer pressure, and the recording industry. He has judgment, not just defiance or allegiance. It would bother him if, in a case where he thought his appreciation truly merited, he could find no seconding in the reactions of others. And, oppositional as he is, he wants to share these good things with me, doesn’t want to lose respect for my judgment, or think that I am prepared to respond only to the most superficial aspects of his choices, “dismissing” him and his music as not worth attending to.

The objective aspiration of aesthetic judgment my son feels in his bones. As Kant explains:

[He] rightly lays claim to everyone’s assent, even though [his] judgment is empirical and a singular judgment. For the basis of [his] pleasure is found in the universal, though subjective, condition of reflective judgments, namely, the purposive harmony of an object with the mutual relation of the cognitive powers (imagination and understanding) that are required for [all] cognition. [CJ 191]

Russell felt the objective aspiration of *moral* judgment in his bones. Not the same aspiration. It is grounded not in appreciative or contemplative pleasure, but in the conditions of human well-being in general – conditions that also are “universal, though subjective”. His example, after all, is the causing of pain in others.

Moral realists like Aristotle, Kant, and Mill might be wrong that there are objective concepts and criteria that apply to all humans and that unite the features of impartiality, intrinsic

enjoyment, sensation, and imagination and understanding (in the case of aesthetic value), or impartiality, human well-being, mutual respect, and social cooperation and understanding (in the case of moral value).⁴⁰ They might be wrong that there are possible ways of life for individuals and societies that unite these various elements. They might be wrong about what the objective criteria or standards are, in whole or in part. They might be wrong about the actual or potential motivational hold of these features upon us – about how enduringly important they have been in human life and can be expected to continue to be. They might be wrong about whether our actual conduct and inquiry could *attune* our thinking and practices to the objective values they purport to represent. And they might be wrong to think that any such concepts, criteria, or standards could apply universally – their realism might have to be tempered relationally.⁴¹

All these *theories* and *beliefs* about the good and the beautiful might be mistaken, plain old wrong. Certainly the *synthetic*, objective content of these theories and beliefs is formidable. Aristotle, Kant, and Mill worked very hard to show that this content could credibly be believed – including the parts about the centrality of moral and aesthetic concerns in human life and in the deeper springs of human motivation, and the unlikelihood of this ever going away. Whether or not anything like this content is true – plain old true – is what I take to be the core set of questions concerning moral and aesthetic realism, once the semantic dust has settled.

⁴⁰Kant shows that moral and aesthetic realism can be “non-naturalistic” in the sense that it can be given an ultimate philosophical ground in transcendental idealism rather than Aristotelian or Millian naturalism. If one denies a transcendental idealist any claim to realism, then one is *defining* realism rather too narrowly for my sense of things. For isn’t transcendental idealism an account of *the plain facts of the world*, empirical and noumenal? Are “dogmatic metaphysics” essential to realism – or to its dogmatic metaphysical form?

⁴¹There is space for a relativistic moral or aesthetic realism – relational facts may supervene on non-relational facts, but they aren’t in any sense “unreal”. A relativistic moral realism, however, would require a delicate or revisionist handling of the absolute purport many find truistic of

In 1986 I wrote:

Morality, then, is not ideology made sincere and general – ideology is intrinsically given to heart-felt generalization. Morality is ideology that has faced the facts.⁴²

That isn't right. Morality is ideology *aspiring* to face the facts, but all ideologies in some sense aspire to "face the facts". If the formidable content just described does not obtain, then morality ends up yet another ideology, another aspiration. This seems to me improbable, but nothing *a priori* rules it out. Certainly I see no way of securing this formidable content "on the cheap" via semantic theory. Realism about morality (and aesthetics) requires more than a "disciplined predicative practice". It requires that we be able to show that what disciplines these predicates in human thought and practice corresponds to their objective content, and that is a large-scale defense across a wide range of commitments. No wonder Aristotle, Kant, and Mill had to work so hard!⁴³

moral discourse. Cf. Harman's contribution to *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*.

⁴²"Moral Realism"

⁴³I am grateful to my colleagues Stephen Darwall, Alan Gibbard, and Jason Stanley for their tolerance of my efforts to work this view into some kind of intelligible shape, and for much help in seeing where it is shapeless. David Hills and Kendall Walton gave me valuable assistance in thinking about aesthetic value.