

THE CONTENT OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

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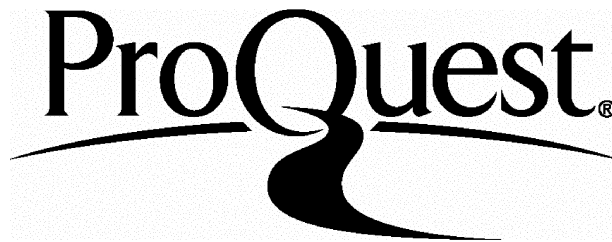
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis deals with issues within the theory of content for moral judgements. A theory of content should specify what kinds of judgement moral judgements are and what is necessary in order to grasp and to make a moral judgement. In Chapter I I specify what kinds of judgements I will deal with. I call these Moral Evaluative Judgements. In Chapter II I argue that a theory of content for moral judgements must observe the constraint that moral judgements are essentially practical and that moral beliefs are intrinsically motivational. In Chapter III I argue that moral judgements are subjectively dependent in a way which places restrictions on any notion of objectivity which might account for what moral judgements claim. In Chapter IV I examine the claim that moral judgements are assertoric and minimally truth-apt. I argue that this does not show that moral judgements are essentially cognitive judgements. In Chapter V I examine an attempt to further substantiate the claim that moral judgements are cognitive and factual. I argue that this attempt is underdetermined by the evidence. In Chapter VI I examine an account on which moral judgements are non-cognitive and express subjective mental states. I claim that this account is along the right lines.

## THE CONTENT OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

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## I. MORAL EVALUATION

### 1. Moral Judgements

What is a moral judgement and what is it to make one? A full theory of the nature of moral judgements should give an understanding of what I shall call the Function, Justification and Content of moral judgements. An account of the function of moral judgements should supply an understanding of what such judgements are for and by what ideals they operate. An account of the justification of moral judgements should supply an understanding of what sorts of reasons can be supplied for moral judgements and an understanding of the scope and nature of moral argument and agreement. An account of the content of moral judgements should specify what kind of judgements moral judgements are and should yield some understanding of what is understood and judged by someone who makes a moral judgement, what a moral judgement consists in and what an agent is doing when he makes a moral judgement. A theory of content for moral judgements is essentially a theory of what kinds of claims moral judgements are. The features of function, justification and content are closely linked. There may be no hope in accounting for one of them in complete isolation from the other. It might be argued, for example, that the function of moral judgements

enters into a full specification of what it is to make a moral judgement. Furthermore, facts about the scope of moral argument might have effects on the choice of a theory of content for moral judgements. A full account of moral judgements should integrate the features of function, justification and content in such a way as to create an explanatory whole. This thesis deals with issues within a theory of content.

## 2. The Content Of Moral Judgements

Broadly speaking, the content of a moral judgement is what would be revealed by a proper understanding of that judgement. A proper understanding of a moral judgement should reveal what a speaker is judging when he makes a moral judgement. An account of the content of moral judgements should place such judgements accurately on a map of judgements in general and reveal their relationship to other kinds of judgement and to each other. The notion of content that I wish to use can be illuminatingly compared with one identified by Christopher Peacocke (Peacocke,1986). According to Peacocke, a basic theory of content determines the structural and logical features of thoughts as objects of propositional attitudes. A substantial theory of content aims to explain what it is for a subject to grasp or to be able to judge a content of a determinate kind. A theory of content understood in this way should be supplemented by an explanation of what it is for a moral judgement to be assertable, what it is to know that a certain judgement is assertable and what it is for a moral judgement to be, if any moral

judgement ever is, true. At least the first of these issues belongs properly to the theory of justification for moral judgements. My emphasis will be on issues around a substantial theory of content in Peacocke's sense for moral judgements, although issues within a basic theory will also be a part of the discussion.

### 3. Moral Evaluation

What is to be understood by the terms 'evaluation' and 'moral' respectively?

3a) **Evaluation** By evaluation and evaluative judgement I mean a certain species of judgement that plays an important role in practical deliberation. Sometimes this might be deliberation about what to do, but it need not always be so. One might decide after serious thought that it would have been better if there had been eight rather than nine planets in the solar system or that it would have been better if the Greeks had never attacked Troy. No immediate conclusions about actions follow from these judgements. I will, however, maintain that there must be some connection with motivation for judgements to be morally evaluative judgements. It also seems clear that motivation and successful action play an important role in the explanation of the function of such judgements.

An evaluative judgement attributes (absolute or relative) value to

something. To invest something with value is to attribute to it importance of some kind. To attribute importance to something is to regard it as important in some respect or other. There can be no evaluation which is not evaluation in some respect. If it is impossible to specify in what respect something is valuable, then that thing cannot be valued at all.

David Lewis offers a very simple model of what it is to value something (Lewis, 1989; Frankfurt, 1988). Valuing is a mental state, directed towards the thing that is valued. What we value is what we desire to desire. So valuing something is to desire to desire it. This account brings out two interesting features of valuation: Firstly, valuation is tied to motivation via desire. Secondly, valuation is more complex than simple inclination. On this view it is not enough for me to value bananas that I desire bananas. For me to value bananas I must be in the higher-order state of desiring to desire them. Lewis thinks this feature captures the reflectively deliberative character of evaluation. For if one supposes that I desire both bananas and hard drugs, but only desire to desire bananas, then it is true that I value bananas but not true that I value hard drugs. Whatever the merits of this account I would claim that any adequate theory of evaluation should capture the tie with motivation and the possibility of reflective deliberation.

One characteristic of evaluation that a further elaboration of Lewis's theory would bring out is the possibility of ordering among values, as



when moral agents are forced to choose between alternatives: Should I tell my wife while in the process of divorcing her that I have been having an affair with the neighbour for five years, or should I leave it until later in the hope that then the effects might be less severe? In this case one might have to work out an ordering of priority between eg. the virtues of honesty and utility. But clearly not all evaluation is comparative in character. If someone judges that Vidkun Quisling was a bad person the content of that statement is not directly dependent on him being better or worse than others. If it is claimed that Rommel was courageous then there is no implication internal to that judgement that most people are not courageous. Another feature that has been taken to be intrinsic to evaluative judgements but which Lewis's account fails to capture is the feature of commendation (M.Johnston,1989). To value something is to judge it to be valuable and thereby essentially to be prepared to commend it to others. This claim brings out a crucial feature of at least some moral judgements: in making moral judgements agents tend to legislate in some sense in favour of what they value. If this feature were essential to all moral judgements it would rule out as a moral judgement any judgement in the form of an individual preference.

What are the limits of evaluative judgement? There are clearly judgements which are not evaluative in any sense. The judgement that the Oslo-Stavanger Night Express will leave at 10:30 is not an evaluative judgement. The judgement that it had better leave at 10:30 is. What is

the difference? One inadequate claim about this difference is the claim that one judgement ties in with motivation and the other does not. The fact that Norwegian trains leave on time has plenty of motivational effects on travellers who know this. Another inadequate suggestion is that evaluative judgements depend on agents' preferences whereas other judgements do not. If I judge that the right thing to do is to leave my wife's lover alone I might still prefer to murder him ruthlessly and with much pleasure. However, it is still plausible that evaluative judgements do have a connection with preference and motivation in such a way that these features are integral to the nature of these judgements. For moral judgements in particular, what moral agents can be disposed to be motivated by or prefer seem to be candidates to provide a constraint on what can be morally valued and on what can be morally valuable.

3b) **Morality** By Moral Evaluation I intend to pick out a wide range of different judgements. Morality is not restricted to moral systems of the kind created by philosophers like Kant, and which possess the distinctive quality of what Bernard Williams has called 'morality' (Williams, 1985; Kant, 1785/1972). Neither is it to be taken to refer to some ideal that might be reached at the limit of enquiry. The claim that war is a good thing can be a moral claim even if it might ultimately be regarded as mistaken in the light of reflection. My use of the term 'moral' is more akin to Williams's use of the term 'ethical'. Williams attempts to identify

what he calls the ethical by reference to a question he attributes to Socrates (Williams, 1985; Socrates, 1948(352D)). Socrates's question is the general question of how one should live. There are three interesting features of this question according to Williams. Firstly, the question exhibits an element of generality: as posed it is relevant to any moral agent. It is not the same question as the personal question how I, as an individual, should live. Secondly, the question posed by Socrates allegedly relates to a way of life, and to the way a life is lived as a whole. Thirdly, the question is what Williams calls morally neutral. How one should live is something one might decide on the basis of various considerations, only some of which will be considerations from a narrowly moral point of view (eg. from within a system of moral thinking). Williams regards the moral as a particular development of the ethical, a development to be found especially in the western world with its ethics based on concepts such as obligation.

Under the heading of the ethical Williams mentions the following types of consideration: a) considerations relating to obligations, such as promises, duties, status-related demands and demands of contract, b) considerations relating to consequences of actions, such as utilitarian considerations of the form 'it would be better if...' and c) considerations relating to what are known as the virtues, connected with evaluative descriptions of 'a disposition of character to choose or reject actions because they are of a certain ethically relevant kind' (Williams,

1985(p.9)). All these considerations would qualify as moral considerations in my use of the term.

To draw a limit to moral considerations as opposed to other considerations Williams's delimitation of the ethical is again useful. Ethical considerations exclude at least two types of consideration. Firstly, they exclude egoistical considerations, which are 'those that relate merely to the comfort, excitement, power or other advantage of the agent' (Williams,1985(p.12)). Ethical considerations thus include essentially the 'demands, needs, claims, desires /and/.. the lives of other people' (Williams,1985(p.12)). This does not imply that a moral judgement might not rule that people should serve their own interests. It only implies that it could do so only on the basis of non-egoistical considerations essentially involved in the ethical. The second type of consideration which is excluded by ethical considerations is purely malevolent considerations. Such considerations may come in at least two forms. An agent might take pleasure in the pain of others (egoistical malevolence), or an agent might behave malevolently without regard for his own pleasure, but do so independently of any ethical considerations. What the exclusion of these types of consideration indicates is that moral considerations are essentially connected in some way with what is regarded as being beneficial to morally relevant beings and thus of value from a moral point of view. The scope of the ethical thus outlined includes the family, the community, the nation and the universal moral

constituency (however that is understood). It is thus the scope of an essentially social point of view, which one might contrast with any purely personal or purely impersonal point of view. This feature of the ethical is also central to what I will call morality.

Williams's definition of the ethical is similar to the conception of the moral as applied by David Wiggins with explicit reference to Hume (Wiggins,1987; Hume,1751/1975). According to this conception the moral point of view is one that is common to moral agents. Judgements made from a moral point of view are made as it were on behalf of both the speaker and the rest of the moral community. Because moral considerations appeal to an intersubjective point of view, they are to that extent impersonal. Wiggins claims that at the level of content consensus appears in some way to be intrinsic to what moral judgements claim. The characterizations of morality given by Williams and Wiggins suggest the following characterization of moral judgement: To morally evaluate something is to attribute importance to it, on the basis of considerations deriving from an intersubjective point of view, and in the light of the ideals and functions of moral considerations.

#### 4. Varieties Of Moral Judgement

There is no reason to assume that all forms of moral judgement should be susceptible to the same detailed account of function, justification or content. A common scheme of division in the current literature divides

moral judgements into three kinds (Williams,1985; Wiggins,1987). Judgements of the first category is often called Practical Moral Judgements: They relate to what should be done or what ought to happen, as considered from a moral point of view. Such judgements often have an imperative form, such as "Everyone should treat human beings with unconditional respect", "He must be punished", "You cannot betray him" and so on. Like all moral judgements these judgements obey standard syntactical rules for indicative sentences such as negation and embedding within conditionals. They do not, however, appear to perform any substantively descriptive role. Partly due to their apparent lack of descriptive content, and partly due to problems about their justification, these judgements have been regarded as controversial candidates for truth, factuality, knowability and rational agreement (Williams,1985; Wiggins,1987).

The second common category has been called Thin Moral Judgements. Thin judgements come in at least two forms. Firstly, there is a species of thin judgement which is often used to provide reasons for practical judgements, namely judgements of right and wrong: " It is right to treat human beings with conditional respect ", " It is wrong to torture " etc. To say that torture is wrong does not appear to be describing it in any way. Nevertheless, such judgements do seem to involve something like a claim to factuality in that it might be argued that such judgements can be true. It seems plausible to expect their justification to be constrained

by their close link to practical judgements, since practical judgements are often made on their basis. The second form of thin moral judgements are judgements of good and bad, which do not have this close link with practical judgements. These judgements might appear to ascribe a property of some kind to an agent or an event: "Socrates was not as good as people like to think", "The Middle Ages was a bad time for morality". It is controversial whether these judgements have any substantial descriptive content. However, such judgements have been thought to stand some chance as candidates for factuality and truth.

The third type of moral judgements are known as Thick Moral Judgements. Thick judgements are judgements that carry substantively descriptive information but which are in some sense associated with the attribution of value. One class of concepts which enter into such judgements are the concepts of the classical virtues (Williams, 1985). To say that Odysseus was courageous is not, on one view, merely to attribute to Odysseus physical strength and prowess in war. It also includes the attribution of value to Odysseus or commends the qualities of Odysseus to others. Another example of a putatively thick moral judgement is the judgement that someone has committed himself to something, a judgement which might be taken to supply information about what someone has done and also carry some implication about what ought to be done.

The status of thick judgements is by no means clear. It is true that for some concepts, such as courage, there are definite criteria by which one might judge whether someone is courageous or not. This might seem to show that such thick judgements are judgements of fact. But it has been denied that the element of evaluation that people attach to properties picked out by thick concepts is a proper part of the meaning of such concepts (Blackburn, 1992a). For example, it seems plausible to suggest that I do not need to be favourably disposed towards upholding a commitment to understand what a commitment is. A natural suggestion would be that judgements with no intrinsic evaluative content may be put to evaluative uses. On the other hand, there are putatively thick concepts for which some evaluative element is more plausibly regarded as part of their meaning. For example, legal terms appear to have a more or less fixed evaluative meaning but a contestable descriptive meaning (Gibbard, 1992). It is then a further question whether and to what extent these two components can be disentangled. I do not wish to settle these issues here, but I will allow that there might be at least some thick moral judgements.

There might be other ways of classifying moral judgements than this threefold one. It does seem, though, that many obviously moral judgements, such as judgements of virtue, warrant, comparison and what to do, fit the above scheme well. In any case, my classification will cover the judgements with which the present enquiry is concerned.



## The Structure Of Discussion

The aim of the investigation is to get clear about issues concerning the content of moral judgements and what strategies might prove most useful to settle the disputes which arise with respect to them. The ultimate aim is to gain a clear idea of the correct characterization of the various contents that a moral thinker entertains when he makes moral judgements and the relation in which he stands to them in so doing. Furthermore, the discussion is intended to cast some light on what a moral agent is doing when he makes a moral judgement and what it is to make a moral judgement. I have divided the investigation into five parts. In the first part (Chapter II) I examine what constraints on a theory of content are created by a correct theory of moral belief. More specifically, I argue that an account of moral judgements is constrained by the existence of a conceptual tie between moral judgements or beliefs, and motivation. In the second part (Chapter III) I examine whether any notion of objectivity can account for what moral judgements claim, and what constraints the alleged subject-dependence of such judgements creates for a theory of moral judgements. I claim that moral judgements are candidates for a notion of objectivity compatible with a high degree of justification. In the third part (Chapter IV) I review a proposal to the effect that moral discourse is assertoric in content in a way determined by the syntactic features of moral discourse and the internal discipline which this discourse displays. In effect, this proposal

suggests a way of defining a truth-predicate for moral judgements. I argue that this proposal is insufficient to show that moral agents, when making moral judgements, are essentially in the business of making cognitive claims about matters of fact. In the fourth part (Chapter V) I discuss what I take to be the strongest attempt to substantiate the notion of moral truth beyond the minimal sense that is suggested in Chapter IV. I argue that this attempt is underdeveloped. In the fifth part (Chapter VI) I assess a line of thought which aims to construe moral judgements as non-fact stating. In effect the view is that moral judgements have an expressive function, so that to make a moral judgement is to express a state of mind like approval or disapproval, rather than to assert that something is the case. I argue that, at least as far as a substantial theory of content is concerned, the most promising among existing proposals are along these lines.

## II. MOTIVATION AND THE CONTENT OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

### 1. The Practical Nature Of Morality

It is a widely held view that morality is practical. The function of moral considerations is to influence conduct, to motivate people and to provide people with reason to act. This feature of morality has been taken by some to rule out a certain view of the content of moral judgements and a related conception of moral belief. The practical nature of morality has been taken to supply the basis for an attack on the view that moral judgements have factual content (Blackburn,1984). My aim in this chapter is to motivate and defend the view that moral judgements are practical in the sense that they have motivational content. I then go on to claim that this fact in itself is insufficient to show that moral judgements have non-factual content.

### 2. Internalism And Externalism About Moral Belief

To get some purchase on the claim that morality is practical one might consider the following two examples:

Example 1) Individual A is a community-worker. A commonly encounters child-abuse. Often in such cases the pressures involved force a rapid choice between two alternatives: a) take the child into care to ensure its safety, or b) ensure the detention of the molester to prevent further harm being caused. A has treated 100 such cases, in 99 of which he has chosen to ensure the arrest of the molester. But in discussion, A sincerely avows that it is much more important in such situations to ensure the safety of the child than to arrest the offender. From an abstract point of view the case looks like this: A is faced with the choice between options a) and b). In a vast majority of cases A chooses b). A claims to value a) over b). Suppose now that all relevant information is known such that there is no explanation at hand to put A's choices in tune with his avowals. Is there then some feature of the concept of moral evaluation which rules out A's avowal as irrational or conceptually confused? An affirmative answer to this question might depend on something like the following principle: If an agent A is in a state of morally valuing x over y, then A has acquired a disposition such that he will, all other things being equal, choose x rather than y. This principle is a priori and to the effect that there exists a conceptual link between being in a state of valuing some thing more than some other thing, and being motivated more favourably towards that thing. That the claim is a conceptual one means that a blatant violation of this principle in behaviour will force a withdrawal of the ascription of the valuational state in question. In the example above we can say that either A does not in

fact value the safety of the victims over the detention of the offenders, or there is, contrary to what we supposed, some explanation at hand of why A acted against his preferences in 99 out of 100 cases. A similar principle might be formulated for moral beliefs: If an agent A is in a state of morally believing x to be valuable, then A has acquired a disposition such that he will, all other things being equal, be favourably motivated towards x.

The principle of internalism for moral beliefs is a very weak one. It does not require that there be some specific action correlated with every type of moral belief. Nor does it require that every moral belief must, on every occasion, have some motivational effects. The agent might think he has reasons that outweigh any moral ones. Or he might suffer from weakness of will. The principle does not have the form of a scientifically useful generalization. If a certain evaluational consideration is present in the mental set of a certain agent, then if that consideration fails to motivate, that logically entails the presence of some other motivational consideration which cancels out the first one. This means that to acquire a moral belief is to acquire a disposition or potential cause for action which requires the presence of a contrary cause for it not to be active. Any state which does not include such a potential cause is not a moral belief. Put in terms of reasons as motivational causes one might say that a moral belief is a cause which will motivate unless it is preempted by some other cause.

Example 2) Individual B is in charge of a depot during war. Half the depot is full of food and the other half is full of starving prisoners of war. B maintains that he is required, given his moral beliefs, to give the prisoners at least some of the food under his legislation, but does not see that as any reason at all why he should give the prisoners any food. The case here is of someone who claims to accept a moral claim but who fails to see that as any reason to abide by it. This case would be ruled out as incoherent by the following principle: If an agent B holds a moral belief P, then B will necessarily acknowledge P as a reason for action. The claim here is that to assent to a moral judgement is to assent to having some reason to abide by what that moral judgement demands. It follows from this principle that individual B is wrong about his moral beliefs, either as a matter of self-deception or as a matter of conceptual confusion.

Example 1) appeals to an intrinsic connection between moral considerations and motivation. Example 2) appeals to an intrinsic connection between moral considerations and reasons for action. I will call the thesis that it is impossible for someone to have a moral belief and remain unmotivated in the specified way Motivation Internalism. I will call the thesis that it is inconceivable that someone should have a moral belief which does not constitute any reason to act for that person Justification Internalism. Justification internalism should not be confused with a version of internalism which one might call Reason Internalism.

Justification internalism operates with a notion of reason which is evaluative or normative. Reason internalism operates with a notion of reason that is explanatory and causal. Reasons are motives: to have a reason to act is to have a motive to act and vice versa. Reason internalism might therefore be regarded as one way of cashing out motivation internalism. Now it might be possible to hold that some consideration constitutes a reason in the motivational sense without thinking that it provides any reason in the justificatory sense. An individual might think that by murdering his neighbour's entire family he might become a lot happier. He might admit that this provides him with some reason in the motivational sense without thinking that it provides him with any reason in the justificatory sense. However, it might be held that only a consideration that could be a reason in the motivational sense could be a reason in the justificatory sense. An even stronger view claims that only a consideration that is in fact a reason in the motivational sense, eg. a desire, can provide any reason in the justificatory sense. I will not attempt to settle these claims here. What I will do is assess some lines of argument which have been thought to cast doubt upon the theses of motivation and justification internalism. I will claim that these attempts do not succeed in undermining the putative ties between moral belief and motivation and justification.

### 3. The Case Against Externalism

Against the varieties of internalism outlined above one might set up corresponding externalist accounts. Motivation externalism is the view that the motivational force of moral beliefs and judgements is not a feature intrinsically connected with the moral concepts employed within them. Justification externalism is the claim that the acceptance of a moral judgement does not imply by the nature of the concepts involved in that judgement the acceptance of the claim that that judgement provides one with any reason to do one thing rather than another.

Motivation externalism may come to either of three claims: a) moral beliefs do not motivate as a matter of necessary truth, b) moral beliefs do not motivate as a matter of a priori truth, or c) the fact that moral beliefs motivate is not a feature purely of the concept of morality. All of a)-c) are held to be true by D.O. Brink (Brink,1990). Brink endorses a thesis regarding motivation known as the Belief/Desire Thesis (BD) (Hume, 1751/1975). The crucial features of BD are the following: Intentional actions are explicable by appeal to two types of mental state - beliefs and desires. A belief/desire complex can guarantee motivational pressure in an individual. On occasion belief/desire complexes are sufficient for action. Desires guarantee motivational pressure whenever they are present. Beliefs, on the other hand, are in themselves always insufficient to ensure motivational pressure and therefore only enter into motivation when they form parts of belief/desire complexes or against a background of such complexes. Brink holds that no set of cognitive



states can necessitate any affective or motivational attitude. Furthermore, perceived facts only provide reasons when combined with a suitable desire. Brink thus endorses both motivation and justification externalism.

One motivation for Brink's account is his wish to defend the claims that moral judgements can be true or false, that true moral judgements pick out properties in the world which exist independently of us, and that the psychological attitudes which people have towards these properties are cognitive intentional states. Brink endorses BD and therefore does not believe that moral beliefs are intrinsically motivational. Furthermore, by driving a wedge between moral truth and reasons on the one hand and human desires on the other, Brink hopes to show that moral claims satisfy the requirements of objectivity and subject-independence, which he believes must be satisfied to attain genuine truth. If such a position was tenable it might be possible to come to definite agreement as to what moral truth consists in. If one could agree to constraints on what is to count as the moral point of view, eg. the point of view of general human happiness, then what is morally required would be what served this end. Precise demands could then be discovered by empirical research.

Brink claims to have a counterexample which demonstrates the falsity of both motivation and justification internalism. The example is the

Amoralist, who recognizes a certain moral obligation as an obligation of his, but who remains unmotivated because he sees no reason why the fact that he is morally obliged to do something should give him any reason to act accordingly. The claim is that the very intelligibility of this example supplies a proof of the falsity of internalism.

If this example is intelligible, then motivation and justification internalism are indeed false. It should be noted that the example requires that the agent remains totally unmotivated by the moral consideration he claims to accept, all other things being equal, and that the moral consideration can be accepted without providing any reason for action. Internalism can make room for the possibilities that the agent is insufficiently motivated to act on any occasion, and that the moral consideration does not provide sufficient reason to act on any occasion. Brink's claim is that even the strongest form of amoralist is possible, so that no amount of defeated desires or reasons is relevant to his case.

An internalist defence against Brink might be constructed along the following lines. Whatever the putative amoralist has it is not a moral belief. It is true that a person might consider actions x,y,z beneficial from a certain point of view without caring about that point of view. A person can also recognize the existence of a certain custom or convention from which certain rules of action might follow. But neither of these scenarios amounts to anything that satisfies the conceptual constraints of a moral

belief as that concept is most commonly used. To recognize or accept a moral judgement is to endorse the moral point of view or enter into a certain custom, where that implies some form of motivational and justificatory commitment. In so far as one abstains from this, one will be confused if one claims to have a moral belief, since to have a moral belief or make a moral judgement just is to recognize some reason to care about something. A possible amoralist is someone who does not care about the moral point of view or moral customs. But in so far as that is true of him he does not have any moral beliefs, only beliefs about morality. Moral beliefs and judgements are essentially a matter of endorsement.

It may now be unclear whether there is in fact a real dispute here or whether the issue is merely a terminological one. Perhaps what Brink has in mind when he talks of moral beliefs are just the kind of noncommittal states that the internalist allows for the amoralist. This does not seem plausible, however, since Brink takes himself to be offering a counterexample to internalism. If it were really the case that he is dealing with something different from the internalist, then it is unhelpful to present his view as one opposed to internalism, as it is unlikely that the internalist would deny the externalist claim for beliefs about moral requirements which do not require the endorsement of the moral point of view.

Two other putative counterexamples to internalism are discussed by Jonathan Dancy (Dancy,1993). The first of these concerns the evil person who desires evil for its own sake. This person considers acts such as torture to be morally wrong, but claims to engage in such acts precisely for that reason. Now it is clearly possible to wish others harm, but this in itself does not entail endorsing evil for its own sake. Internalism can easily accommodate a situation where evil is sought but where other considerations are relevant to the explanation of the agent's dispositions to act, such that these other considerations were outweighed as motivational factors. What the example requires is a case where the only relevant element of motivation is the desire for evil and where the agent still accepts moral judgements which tell against the evil in question. Dancy claims that such a scenario is impossible, because to understand or to comprehend some outcome being desired one must be able to make out some connection between it and some good. I cannot see that this is a satisfactory response. That I desire something x, and that therefore x can be regarded in some abstract way as a good for me or desired by me, does not entail that I desire x as something that is good, much less does it entail that I must desire x as something morally good. I do not therefore believe that appeal to the general principle invoked by Dancy will settle this case. However, one might respond to the case of the evil person along the same lines as I responded to the case of the amoralist above. In so far as the evil person sees the moral judgement as no reason for him to act in any

moral way, and in so far as that person shows no sign, all other things being equal, of being favourably motivated by that moral judgement, he cannot be said to have accepted the moral judgement in question in the appropriate sense of endorsement. This response would allow for the case of the purely evil person at the cost of denying that he had the moral belief in question. What he had was a belief that something or other was desirable from a moral point of view. But this belief is compatible with the strongest form of aversion towards morality.

The second case discussed, and dismissed, by Dancy concerns what he calls moral 'accidie'. An agent suffering from moral accidie is temporarily indifferent to moral considerations due to eg. depression or stress, features which deprive what would otherwise have been sufficient reasons of their motivating force. It seems clear that this case does not constitute a counterexample to internalism as I have formulated it above. An internalist of the kind picked out by my definition would presumably argue that a case of moral accidie is a case where moral indifference is caused by exactly the kind of condition which the *ceteris paribus* clause in the definition of internalism is meant to rule out. The case of accidie would only be a problem for a type of internalist who held that agents are always successfully motivated by their moral beliefs (McDowell, 1978). I regard internalism in this form as too strong, and maintain that what the example of accidie brings out is that the connection between moral belief and action is defeasible.

One consideration central to Brink's externalism is the desire to make moral truth independent of agents' desires in the strongest possible way. If one accepts BD, then it seems externalism is required for this result. But externalism requires a strong explanatory account of the link between moral conviction and motivation which does justice to the fact that it is hard to imagine cases where this link fails to obtain. The practical character of morality is explained by externalism as a result of the fact that people are motivated by the acknowledgement of truths. The motivational ties of moral judgements are a feature of their characteristic function, not of their content. Morality concerns us because we think it is true that things possess value. This fact is meant to explain moral agreement and the application of moral judgements beyond our immediate surroundings. The emotive and prescriptive force of moral judgements is meant to rest on the basis of "deep" or widely shared psychological facts', such as the existence of sympathy and the benefits of cooperation (Brink, 1989 (p.21)). But clearly an internalist account of moral beliefs will also be able to accommodate these features, in addition to features that the externalist does not have available to him. It therefore seems that externalism is in no better position to explain the practical character of morality than internalism is.

#### 4. Weak Internalism

Moral beliefs are states which satisfy the criteria of weak internalism. It follows that a persistent disposition to assent to a moral judgement in

discussion is not a moral belief unless there is an intrinsic connection between it and some motivating tendency. Moral beliefs are thus not phenomenologically transparent. Now, internalism cannot serve to distinguish moral beliefs uniquely. Evaluative beliefs of other kinds, such as aesthetic ones or perhaps judgements about what is rational, might also call for an internalist account. Furthermore, we may leave it open whether the withdrawal of the ascription of paradigmatically factual beliefs in the face of inexplicable behaviour should force us to give an internalist account of those beliefs.

A limited form of internalism with regard to moral belief leaves room for distinguishing at least two kinds of motivational involvement for different species of moral beliefs. The distinction picks out what might be called Motivation Dependent and Motivation Involving moral beliefs. Motivation dependent beliefs have an intimate connection with particular actions without which they cannot be adequately identified. A typical example of a motivation dependent belief is the belief that everyone must help others when they are in need. Motivation involving beliefs do not have such an intimate connection with any particular action or actions. At the same time they satisfy the internalist constraint in the minimal sense, in that lack of motivation on an appropriate occasion implies the existence of some explanation in accordance with the *ceteris paribus* constraint as to why the belief is not motivationally effective. An example of such a belief is the positive evaluation of a state of affairs, such as peace on

earth. To believe that peace is morally desirable does not commit one to the dispositional performance of any particular type of action. Nevertheless, a total disinclination to bring about this state of affairs if the opportunity arises will, in the absence of some appropriate explanation, bring about the withdrawal of the ascription of the moral belief.

#### 5. Consequences Of Internalism

Given internalism, there are two positions which might be argued for regarding the relationship between the nature of moral beliefs on the one hand and the content of moral judgements on the other. The first position is internalist cognitivism. On this view moral conviction consists in the existence of a cognitive state, a belief which may or may not be independent of the existence of a particular desire. Furthermore, moral belief does not require the existence of an independently intelligible desire to motivate, there is a conceptual connection between moral belief and motivation, and/or accepting a moral judgement entails accepting that one has some reason for action. The second position is internalist non-cognitivism. On this view moral conviction is constituted either by some affective non-cognitive attitude or by a mental state containing as an element such an attitude. Furthermore, there is an intrinsic connection between moral belief and motivation, and/or accepting a moral judgement entails accepting that one has some reason for action.



Are either of these positions defensible?

An account of moral judgements that combines the thesis of internalism with a belief/desire model of psychological explanation could be thought to imply a non-cognitivist theory of moral judgements. Since beliefs regarded on their own are motivationally inert on this model, it follows that if BD is true, then moral beliefs either are or include desires, because desires are necessary for motivation. It might then be thought that since any full specification of a moral belief must make reference to some desire there can be no moral truths. This point is often cashed out in terms of the notion of Directions Of Fit. It is the characteristic function of beliefs to fit the world, such that if they do not, then they are in some way deficient: beliefs aim to make their content match the world. Desires on the other hand function to make the world fit them, such that it is no defect if it does not: desires aim to make the world fit their content (Dancy,1993). If morality is practical, ie. if it is the function of moral judgements to cause changes in the world and to regulate the state of the world, then it is possible to think that moral beliefs can only be adequately understood as on a par with desires, and that by assigning cognitive content to moral beliefs one is misconstruing their basic nature as motivating states.

Simon Blackburn's Quasi-Realist theory of moral judgements is in part motivated by these considerations (Blackburn,1984). Blackburn claims

that the truth of BD shows that moral beliefs are non-cognitive and affective attitudes. If moral judgements express beliefs, then they should serve to supplement desires in the explanation of action. If they express desires, then they should serve to supplement beliefs. But in fact, if a moral agent acquires the belief that an action which he would regard as cruel is taking place, then he will (all other things being equal) act. A non-moral agent might acquire the same belief about the situation and not act. According to Blackburn, this fact is explained by the presence in the moral agent of a state suitably like a desire which constitutes the moral concern for what is taking place and which is identical to what we call the moral belief. In the non-moral agent this state is absent, so there is no disposition to act.

By assuming BD and a thesis of the supervenience of moral properties on natural properties, Blackburn claims that he can show that moral beliefs are states of the same kind as desires. Roughly, the supervenience of moral properties on natural properties implies that moral properties depend on natural properties to the extent that there can be no difference in moral properties without a corresponding difference in natural properties. Now if moral judgements expressed beliefs as they are defined on BD, then they could coexist with any subjective attitude towards the things meeting their truth-conditions. It would be a further question whether one should be motivated by what morally is the case. But then, given supervenience, one could hope to

obtain the same actual dispositions as one's moral ones with regard to the purely natural properties of things, and the absence of a necessary connection between moral beliefs and moral motivation would make the route to motivation via moral belief unnecessary. But in that case it would be unnecessary to use natural properties to determine what the moral properties of a case are: the move from natural to moral properties would be made redundant. So, since moral properties should not be redundant moral judgements do not express beliefs.

#### 6. Cognitivist Internalism

The following defence against Blackburn might be constructed by an internalist who wished to defend a cognitivist account of moral judgements. Even if one accepts the thesis of supervenience, it seems that all Blackburn has shown is that internalism is true. But it is consistent with internalism to claim that moral beliefs motivate, as well as being cognitively respondent to reality. What is now at issue is the status of BD. If one supposes that having a moral belief is being in a genuine mental state which in principle can be given some rough criterion of identity, then the question is whether one can intelligibly envisage a mental state which has two distinct properties at the same time, the property of being cognitively respondent to the world and the property of being a sufficient condition for action at least on occasion. If there is no a priori obstacle to the existence of such a state, then there may be mental states which are correctly characterizable as intrinsically

motivating beliefs (Wright,1988; Dancy,1993).

Allan Gibbard believes that such states might exist and that moral beliefs may be such states (Gibbard,1990). It is a consequence of Gibbard's view that BD cannot be a priori true, since it is a feature integral to his theory that beliefs motivate if that is what the best scientific theory says that they do. Gibbard offers a simple example. Consider a housefly at rest. At the slightest sudden movement in the vicinity it flies off. Gibbard claims that it is legitimate to offer as a putative explanation of this phenomenon the existence of a functional state internal to the fly, a state which both responds to the movement and elicits flight. The state as explicated has two functions: it represents the environment and it causes action. If such states were to be applied in the explanation of human psychology, then the mental states postulated would not be identified as beliefs or desires in BD. However, these states will fail the conditions of BD trivially, since they will be mental states which perform both the functions performed by beliefs and desires as defined by BD, and will yield the kinds of explanation BD might be invoked to supply. In fact, it is not clear that the revised model of explanation could not be captured in BD terms. If it could, then choice between the two models would be a matter of theoretical advantage. Either way, the status of BD is controversial (McDowell,1978; Gibbard,1992; Dancy,1993). Therefore, BD should not be applied as a basic premise in an argument for non-cognitivism without further and independent support.

The displacement of BD as an account of intentional action would not automatically produce a better understanding of moral belief, nor would it imply a cognitivist theory of moral belief or judgement. A mental state that represents a beggar sitting on the stairs is not of the same kind as a mental state that both represents a beggar sitting on the stairs and produces the motivation to give the beggar some money. The crucial questions which remain are in what way the two properties of the latter state are integrated and what the difference between the two states consists in. One relevant issue is whether the intrinsically motivating state motivates in virtue of its cognitively respondent properties and by way of a special subject matter, or whether its motivating capacity is better explained by citing some other feature which it might possess. Non-cognitivism would claim that the motivating feature of moral beliefs is a result of some subjective or affective state such as a desire or an emotion. Cognitivism would claim that this feature of moral beliefs is a result of cognitive acquisition of evaluative concerns, acquired by means of representational concepts or otherwise.

What could be meant by the cognitive acquisition of an evaluative concern? The least that could be meant is that there are certain verdicts reached by moral thinking or reflection on moral responses which cannot be justifiably rejected. This by itself is unclear, and I will return to the ways in which it might be cashed out in Chapters IV and V. What does

seem clear is that the form of justification which moral judgements are capable of has been taken to supply a notion of an intrinsically reason-giving fact (McDowell, 1978; Wright, 1988; Dancy, 1993). If one can make good sense of such facts, then these will be facts the recognition of which implies the acquisition of motives and practical concerns as well as reasons for action: to acquire a true moral belief will then be to recognize a cause for concern. It is thus consistent with internalism about moral beliefs to ask whether it is in the nature of these judgements to answer to facts about moral value. It can also be claimed that this is consistent with moral beliefs being in some way dependent on subjective desires (Chapter III). However, any claim to this effect implies a commitment to come up with an alternative moral psychology (Dancy, 1993).

## 8. Conclusion

There are at least two ways of picking out beliefs among mental states. One way is via their role in motivation. I think it is clear that this connection does not in itself determine whether moral judgements can have factual content. Another way of picking out beliefs which takes a more direct approach to the contents of the judgements which express them is to regard them as the epistemic attitude of holding something to be true or false, a condition which would rule out as beliefs any mental state which could not have this feature. There is a type of argument which combines this requirement with the thesis of internalism and then

goes on to argue that since some subjective pro-attitude is necessary for a mental state to motivate, and since moral beliefs do motivate, moral beliefs cannot be true or false, because the truth-value of a judgement can never depend on the subjective attitudes of the individual who assents to it. The tie with motivation via subjective pro-attitudes fails to observe the constraints of objectivity which are necessary conditions for truth-aptness. In the next chapter I will discuss how this conclusion might be avoided.

### III. OBJECTIVITY AND THE CONTENT OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

#### 1 The Subjective Dependence Of Moral Claims

The aim of this chapter is to identify a notion of objectivity appropriate to moral judgements. The success of this enterprise is a prerequisite for any attempt to construe moral judgements as cognitive judgements or as judgements which can demand acceptance independently of subjective inclination. I will claim that there are constraints on moral objectivity imposed by the fact that a) moral truth must be discernible at least in principle, and b) moral truth must be able to motivate. Within the limits of these constraints there is a plurality of notions which have been thought to constitute the kind of objectivity which moral judgements include a claim to. My aim is not to assess any of these in full. Rather, I wish to locate at least some notions which look like plausible candidates for moral objectivity and which can play a part in the assessment of cognitivism about moral judgements in Chapters IV and V.

Moral judgements depend on subjective responses and dispositions for their content. To say that moral judgements are subjectively dependent



judgements is in part to say that to understand a moral judgement is to grasp something the sense of which is dependent on facts about the nature of certain creatures. A thinker who knew nothing about the makers of moral judgements or about the kind of creatures to which such judgements apply would be unable to fully understand a moral judgement. The crucial issues about the contents of moral judgements are in what sense they are dependent on subjective responses and to what extent this subjective dependence is explicit in what moral judgements claim.

In addition to this fact of subjective dependence it also seems to be constitutive of moral thinking that it allows for error and correction, and that moral thoughts can be entertained without automatically being endorsed. It thus appears that moral thinking presupposes that it is capable of some kind of objectivity. The concept of objectivity can be brought to bear on the examination of the contents of moral judgements in a number of ways, including the objectivity of justification and the claim to objectivity involved in moral judgements. There can be no antecedent guarantee that the notion of objectivity can be applied in the same way to these aspects of moral judgements. For example, it is clearly possible that moral judgements include a claim to objectivity which their scope of justification does not warrant (Mackie,1977). It is unclear whether these issues can be treated independently of each other and to what extent a theory of content should be adapted to a theory of

justification. For example, it could be argued that a rational or correct overall conception of the world is consistent with substantial areas of mistaken conceptions, and that morality might be such an area (Boghossian and Velleman, 1990). But the mere fact that this is possible does not exclude an account of the content of moral judgements tailored to match other normative or metaphysical considerations on explanatory grounds in such a way that moral judgements do not come out as universally false. It might be that a too ambitious notion of objectivity, if applied to what moral judgements claim, fails to do justice to the rationale of moral practice (Blackburn, 1985; Gibbard, 1990). One central question with regard to morality is whether moral arguments can be evaluated with reference to independent standards in such a way that agreement can be justifiably demanded among moral agents. It is not immediately clear that this question commits one to any metaphysically substantial notion of objectivity.

## 2 Epistemic And Motivational Restrictions

That the content of moral judgements is in some way restricted by the nature of moral agents seems plausible. In fact, it seems true that no moral judgement can contain any claim to correctness independently of the possibility of someone discerning its correctness. A fact which was epistemically out of reach for all moral agents would appear to be in principle unsuited to engage with evaluative concerns in the way in which moral beliefs do. In view of the motivational implications of moral

beliefs one can go on to affirm that no moral judgement can contain any claim to correctness independently of the possibility of somebody being motivated by it. This claim is an immediate consequence of internalism when supplemented with the claim that moral truth would be necessarily discernible. But if moral claims are in this sense restricted by the nature of the beings who make those claims, then the issue arises of what the order of dependence is supposed to be between best moral opinion and putatively correct moral opinion (Wright,1992). On the one hand, there is the view of Detected Truth, which maintains that the correctness of moral opinion is conceptually independent of the content of best moral opinion in such a way that moral judgements can be said to detect truths. On the other hand, there is the view of Determined Truth, which claims that the correctness of moral opinion is conceptually determined, at least in part, by best moral opinion, or that best moral judgement determines moral truth. What type of truth could moral judgements include a claim to? If the content of moral judgements is partially dependent on the nature of moral thinkers, then the correctness of moral opinion could not be completely independent of what anyone might think is morally correct. Endorsing subject-dependence thus entails placing strong restrictions on moral objectivity. Moral truth could not be detected truth on this view. The restrictions I have suggested imply that what a moral thinker grasps when he entertains a moral thought must be something which can motivate if accepted and which, if apt for cognitive justification, can be known to be justified. Furthermore, the fact that a

judgement is justified is determined, at least in part, by subjective responses.

If moral judgements are subjectively dependent, then any theory of moral judgements must account for the relationship between the content of these judgements and the dispositions and concerns which make the judgements possible. If moral judgements are to be regarded as cognitive claims, then it must be possible to separate the issue of the content of moral judgements from the issue of the presuppositions that make these judgements possible (Hampshire, 1989; Wiggins, 1990/91). The hope would be that facts about moral agents, such as their affective concerns, might explain the emergence and constitution of a disciplined and fundamentally cognitive practice without those facts entering into the explanations of the contents of individual judgements within that practice. A claim to this effect would include affective states in the explanation of the significance of moral beliefs, but only as a presupposed background which gives sense to moral judgements and which defines their function. To understand a moral judgement will then be to understand a claim to truth or justification which depends for its content on facts about subjective responses, but which is not, even in part, constituted or individuated by any set of individual affective responses. This claim is consistent with the view that to accept a moral judgement necessarily involves some such response. But to explain the content of an individual moral judgement one will give an account of what the judgement claims

to be the case and not refer to some subjective response such as a desire. This claim is denied by non-cognitivists of the expressivist variety (Blackburn, 1984; Gibbard, 1990). Such theorists claim that the subjective responses which make moral judgements possible necessarily enter into the explanation of the content of individual moral judgements. The non-cognitivist claim is that moral judgements are the expressions of such responses in a sense which excludes them from being assertions in any non-trivial sense. I will discuss this dispute in chapters IV-VI.

#### The Moral Claim To Validity

J.L. Mackie held that a moral judgement is 'something that involves a call for action or the refraining from action, and one that is absolute, not contingent upon any desire or policy or choice' (Mackie, 1977 (p33)). On this view moral judgements claim some form of objective validity. How can this be if morality is not independent of subjective desire or opinion?

By definition I have taken the moral to comprise a less than perfectly personal point of view. Moral reasons are reasons from a perspective which the individual shares with at least some other moral agents. Moral judgements can therefore not be understood as simple expressions of taste. To make a moral judgement is not like choosing the flavour of an ice-cream. Nor is it like deciding what I want to be the case, irrespective of what others might want. An expression of mere taste cannot be seen

as constitutive of what a moral agent is doing when he makes a moral judgement, or of the thought that a moral thinker grasps when he understands a moral judgement. Judgements of mere taste and moral judgements can be distinguished both with reference to their function, justification and content. But exactly how far does the claim to objectivity in moral judgements extend? It seems to be true not only that to make a moral judgement is to make a judgement one regards as holding even if one were not/no longer to believe it, but that to make a moral judgement is to make a judgement one regards as holding even if no-one were to believe it. It has been thought that insofar as one treats moral judgements as this claim dictates one is to that extent giving moral thinking the form of a search for truth and that this feature is constitutive of moral practice (Blackburn,1984,1985). Now one might accept this claim in some form while simultaneously asserting that to make a moral judgement is not to make a judgement one would regard as holding independently of anyone's dispositions. This latter claim is to the effect that morality is essentially grounded in subjective needs and desires and therefore tied to natural dispositions to some extent, such that no-one could fully understand a moral judgement and then think it held good independently of anyone's dispositions. But this claim can be constitutive of moral judgements only on a weak reading. It is certainly not inconsistent to hold the moral belief that the natural dispositions of moral agents require a fundamental change. It is not contradictory to accept that morality is essentially subjectively dependent, and yet refuse to

accept the value of the natural dispositions that actually exist.

If one construes moral judgements as claiming universal and unconditional validity, does it follow that one must regard moral judgements as demanding the rational acceptance of all rational agents? It seems to me that neither a cognitivist nor a non-cognitivist theory need be committed to this. I therefore wish to leave it open that there may be no obvious irrationality in the case of an individual who has a moral belief which he regards as fully justified, but who at the same time considers rational the pure egoist who cares only about himself and who therefore without rational mistake regards it as rational to disregard moral reasons of even the highest degree of moral justification (Williams, 1973). On the basis of this case it seems possible to have a moral belief of a strong kind while at the same time accepting that this belief will not be rationally compelling, even for a restricted set of rational agents with similar sensibilities to oneself. This option does not seem to undermine a moral belief as a moral belief. Nor is it incompatible with the claim that rational considerations may on occasion affect one's moral beliefs. Furthermore, if one regards moral judgements as judgements of what one rationally ought to do, then it seems nonsensical to ask why one ought to do what one morally ought to do. But given the case of the egoist, this question does not appear to be nonsensical. Nevertheless, there are theories which attempt to construe moral judgements as judgements of rationality (Gibbard, 1990). I will discuss one such attempt

in Chapter VI.

#### 4. Models Of Objectivity

I now turn to the task of finding a notion of objectivity which is appropriate for the content of moral judgements and which observes the epistemic and motivational constraints I have just outlined. Several different construals of the notion of objectivity figure in the current literature. J.L.Mackie operates with a strictly metaphysical notion of objectivity which he believes moral judgements include a non-descriptive and distinctly normative claim to (Mackie,1977). According to Mackie, moral judgements fail to attain to this kind of objectivity, since objectively the world is fully explicable in terms of properties that can be understood without essential reference to their effects on sentient beings. Morality cannot be understood in this way. It follows that moral properties do not exist and that moral judgements have a content which renders them universally erroneous. Mackie's view is a paradigm example of what I call an anti-realist theory of moral judgements (see Chapter IV). Now clearly Mackie's notion of objectivity fails to meet the constraints I imposed above. It therefore seems unsuited to give an account of what is involved in making moral judgements. In other words, if moral judgements do not aim to refer to properties which can be understood without reference to subjective responses, then they cannot be judged false in virtue of the fact that they do not pick out such properties.



A similar model can be found in the work of Thomas Nagel (Nagel, 1986). Nagel envisages a process of objectification which consists in abstraction away from any perspective which contains features idiosyncratic to it. He imagines a progression from personal preferences and impressions through morality and rationality to a view from 'nowhere'. The process terminates in a most objective point of view, a point of view which is devoid of any idiosyncratic features. This perspective is free from the perspective-dependent properties excluded by Mackie's conception. If such a perspective were possible it would contain no moral features. Morality would thus fail to attain to this degree of objectivity. But Nagel envisages two parallel processes of objectification. One process is appropriate for our factual beliefs about the world. The other process is appropriate for our normative beliefs about what reasons we have. These two processes are entirely self-contained. It is thus no objection to the objectivity of morality to claim that physics mentions nothing about morality in its explanations of how the world works. Thus, Nagel does not see this as a reason for regarding moral judgements as erroneous. Like Mackie he thinks that moral judgements have a non-descriptive 'normative' content, but given the fact that his two models of objectification are self-contained, moral judgements can be seen as justifiable and true, given a correct appreciation of the objectivity which they include a claim to. Whatever Nagel's account comes to it is clear that he does not see moral truth as a matter of facts obtaining in the external world of objects and

properties. Rather, moral truth is to be understood as facts about what reasons there are for doing what. Morality is a form of 'objective re-engagement' where subjective values are objectively 'asserted' to the extent that this is compatible with the claims of others. The moral point of view is at least intersubjectively objective, but not objective in the sense of the view from 'nowhere' (Nagel, 1986 (p.222)). Nagel thinks that this limited form of normative objectivity suffices for moral claims to be cognitively justifiable and true.

Both Mackie's and Nagel's conceptions of objectivity have been subjected to extensive criticism on the ground that the strongest notion of objectivity which they ultimately specify is unattainable as such or incoherent (McDowell, 1979; 1985; 1986). I will pass over these criticisms in silence, except for claiming that the core of Nagel's idea, namely that moral reasons are practical considerations which possess a limited form of objectivity which suffices for their being truth-apt, is not necessarily affected by the possible incoherence of the notion of a view from 'nowhere' or an absolute conception (Nagel, 1986; Williams, 1985). This fact might be partly responsible for Jonathan Dancy's claim to have found in Nagel's discussion a conception of objectivity which moral discourse does satisfy and which Nagel allegedly runs together with his official conception (Dancy, 1993). On this model we have a process of objectification which is potentially infinite (ie. it does not presuppose the existence of a most objective point of view) and which consists in

standing back from an initial perspective to form a new view of the situation which includes that initial perspective as its object. This new view may or may not be in conflict with the previous point of view, but the salient fact about it is that it need not leave anything behind. The fact that morality may conflict with egoism does not preclude the moral point of view from embracing egoistical considerations as part of what determines what it is correct to do from an intersubjective point of view. What was held to in the initial view of the situation (egoism) is not discarded as a mere appearance, but is held to as one might hold to a piece of evidence or a relevant consideration of some sort. A stable state of reflective belief would on this model be seen as a state of knowledge if it were not to suffer the fate of being abandoned in the light of further reflection of the same kind. Dancy claims that one can imagine moral beliefs being stable in the light of further reflection in this way and that they are therefore candidates for this restricted species of objectivity.

There are two problems with this view. Firstly, it is not a notion of objectivity which need be denied by non-cognitivism (Blackburn, 1984). A non-cognitivist could endorse the reflective appreciation of moral judgements. It would thus appear that any such argument would be left in place, and that the possibility of reflective appreciation cannot be used as strong evidence in favour of cognitivism as opposed to non-cognitivism. Furthermore, the suggested model of objectivity employs a

notion of reflection which is only going to do the work intended on the condition that the process is specified in such a way that moral beliefs are distinguished from subjective tastes and preferences. One can easily imagine a state of personal preference, such as a taste for a certain drink for example, which survived continuous reflection without there being any implication that the state involved was a state of knowledge. All the reflective process would appear to show is that moral thinking exhibits a certain degree of internal and reflective discipline, a claim which would not be denied by non-cognitivism. It might therefore seem that the suggested model as it stands fails to provide the criteria which would give the idea that moral judgements are objective its characteristic point. Dancy might argue that a simple preference is not a belief and that the model of objectivity in question is a model for the retention of beliefs. As a model for beliefs it is clearly more promising, if there is no reason to deny that moral judgements have a sufficient number of characteristics in common with beliefs to be illuminatingly treated by the suggested model. Dancy is aware of this, and actually offers a theory of moral beliefs as purely cognitive states with motivational implications (Dancy,1993). If this theory is defensible, then Dancy's model of objectification would be able to distinguish between beliefs and preferences. One final problem that does arise, however, is to what extent moral claims can be correctly characterized as aiming for stability in the light of further reflection, and if such stability is a good candidate for a truth-predicate for moral judgements. I will return to this in Chapters

IV and VI.

John McDowell distinguishes two species of objectivity (McDowell, 1985; Dancy, 1993). Primary Objectivity has at least one of the following features: a) it can be instantiated in a world devoid of perceivers, or b) it is adequately conceivable otherwise than in terms of certain subjective states, or c) it is there entirely independently of us. In light of the fact that it could be held that there are properties (eg. colours) which are subjectively dependent but which nevertheless would be instantiated in a world devoid of perceivers, I will take it that at least condition b) is essential for primary objectivity. This degree of objectivity corresponds fairly well with Mackie's and Nagel's conceptions of absolute objectivity. Secondary Objectivity on the other hand has each of the following characteristics without satisfying the constraints on primary objectivity: it exists without any particular relation to mind, even if it cannot be adequately conceived of except with reference to subjective responses; it exists in some sense independently and waiting to be recognized; and it is not a mere figment of a subjective state purporting to be a response to it. McDowell claims that values and secondary qualities such as colour have secondary but not primary objectivity and that moral judgements include a claim to such secondary objectivity. It is not clear that McDowell would admit that anything can satisfy all the constraints on primary objectivity. In any case, such secondary objectivity as might be ascribed to moral truth is well suited to a view on which value could not

outrun our capacity to discern it, and where our concept of moral value is regarded as unintelligible without reference to responses of holding something to be valuable. For McDowell the issue of whether moral judgements are true or false has metaphysical implications which presuppose that moral judgements are such as to assert that certain properties exist and that they thus have both assertoric and descriptive content.

The notion of secondary objectivity is intended to displace any such model as Mackie's on the ground that such models, even if consistent, are irrelevant to the kind of subject matter with which moral judgements deal. On the basis of the opposition between McDowell and Mackie one can construct an argument bearing directly on the issue of the content of moral judgements: Suppose the only way to give content to the notion of a descriptive judgement is by appealing to a conception of the world as independent of all subject-responses (Mackie,1977; McDowell, 1983,1985). Then, so the argument concludes, moral judgements do not have descriptive content, since their content is not independent of subject-responses. This argument has to show at least two things. Firstly, it must show that moral judgements are essentially dependent on subject-responses in the way the argument requires. This has been denied (Kant, 1785/1972) but seems plausible. Secondly, the argument must show that descriptive content has to be cashed out without reference to subject-responses. It is this claim which McDowell maintains

is mistaken. This may well be true, but it is not clear whether this fact implies anything about the content of moral judgements, since the argument also supposes that a claim to the effect that moral judgements are factual and true should also be a claim to the effect that moral judgements have primarily descriptive content. But this is not at all obvious (See Chapter IV and VI). A further argument is required to show that the only or best way to regard moral judgements as truth-apt and factual is to regard them as having an essentially descriptive function and perhaps, like McDowell, to regard moral responses as somehow perceptual in nature (McDowell, 1978, 1985; Dancy, 1993). I will not discuss this view here. Whatever its merits, it seems that both some notion of secondary objectivity, if regarded in isolation from the descriptivist thesis, and Dancy's model derived from Nagel, are candidates for a notion of objectivity contained in moral judgements. In fact, Dancy's notion could easily accommodate the model of secondary objectivity, and might thus be taken to be a species of it.

Yet a different way of understanding the notion of objectivity can be extracted from the writings of David Wiggins (Wiggins, 1987). Wiggins identifies objectivity with candidacy for what he calls Plain or Substantive Truth. The marks of plain and substantive truth form a comprehensive list which includes the following requirements: a) the judgements at issue must express beliefs, b) the warrant of the judgements at issue must be independent of the subjective state of the person who makes the

judgement, c) the judgements in question may command rational convergence of opinion, d) it must be permissible to speak of these judgements as being true or false in virtue of the obtaining of facts, e) the truths within the discourse must be mutually consistent and f) truth within the discourse must be determinate. Wiggins takes the satisfaction of all these requirements to establish objectivity for the discourse in question, and to create the possibility of a realist position with regard to this discourse in the sense that it will be true to say that judgements within that discourse are true or false in virtue of the existence of substantive facts appropriate to that discourse. It is clearly possible for a discourse to satisfy some but not all of these requirements, such that a discourse might merit a cognitivist construal as truth-apt while not meriting a realist construal as actually picking out any facts. Moral discourse would be such a discourse on Mackie's account and probably on Wiggins's as well (eg. condition c), and perhaps d) for practical judgements; see Chapter V).

Crispin Wright operates with a similar list of requirements which he regards as the requirements of Realism about any given assertoric discourse (Wright, 1992). In addition to the criteria which he shares with Wiggins (a), c), d) and a version of b)), Wright offers a criterion which he calls Width Of Cosmological Role which measures the extent to which the judgements in question are explanatorily useful. For a discourse to be what Wright calls an assertoric discourse it is required only that it



satisfies what he regards as a set of platitudes and syntactic requirements, such as that to assert that P is true is to assert that P. Again, it is clearly possible for an assertoric discourse to satisfy some of the requirements of realism but not all. This account relies on a notion of Minimal Truth which I will return to in Chapter IV.

It is not clear how Wiggins's criteria of objectivity and Wright's criteria of realism mesh with the models of primary and secondary objectivity. Firstly, Wright does not identify the criteria of realism as the criteria of objectivity, but is committed to ascribing some notion of objectivity to any discourse for which a truth-predicate can be defined (ie. any assertoric discourse). In light of his distinction between determined and detected truth, it is clear that he regards the objectivity appropriate to different types of discourse as distinct in kind. Determined truth is closely related to secondary objectivity, and detected truth is close to primary objectivity. The main difference between these notions is that whereas McDowell defines his notion of objectivity in terms of the existence of properties, Wright operates with a notion of truth which is separated from the notion of existence to the extent that it is only with detected truth that it becomes appropriate to speak of the existence of properties. In its basic form the notion of truth is metaphysically neutral. Secondly, it seems that secondary objectivity is bound to fail at least one of the conditions of substantive truth, namely the condition that the judgements within the discourse should command rational agreement. Secondary

objectivity for morality would fail this condition because it is perspectively dependent in such a way that one can imagine thinkers who would not be rationally compelled by moral considerations. Thirdly, substantive truth may not entail primary objectivity, since a)-f) may not entail total subject-independence. Fourthly, Wright's notion of minimal truth might not even imply the applicability of secondary objectivity (as defined by McDowell) and might correspond more closely to a weak version of Dancy's model without the requirement that what is stable in the light of reflection is really a belief (See Chapter IV).

What does seem clear is that Wiggins's requirement b) is crucial to any adequate conception of objectivity for moral judgements. If moral judgements are objective in any interesting sense, then the warrant of an individual judgement must be independent of the subjective state of the person who makes that judgement. This minimal requirement, when supplemented with the constraints of epistemic and motivational accessibility, is consistent with at least the following three candidates for a notion of objectivity for moral judgements: a) Wright's notion of determined truth, b) Dancy's notion of stable objectification, and c) McDowell's notion of secondary objectivity.

## 5. Conclusion

A successful account along the lines of either Dancy or McDowell's

conception would make possible a non-error-theoretic version of cognitivism and would also open the way for a subjectively dependent notion of moral truth. It is clear that both Wiggins and Wright hope that their models will achieve a similar result. All these theorists agree that an adequate theory of moral judgements should account for the basis of morality in the dispositions of moral agents. There does not seem to be any reason in principle why they should not be able to come up with a notion of objectivity for moral judgements which observes this feature. But this fact alone is insufficient to establish the thesis of cognitivism, given that non-cognitivist theories claim to accommodate this feature of moral judgements (Blackburn,1984)). A non-cognitivist about moral judgements would say that moral judgements display a large number of features characteristic of cognitive judgements such as a claim to a limited form of objectivity, but that these features are ultimately explicable with reference to subjective concerns which individual moral judgements express. The following chapter deals with a positive attempt to characterize the content of moral judgements in cognitivist terms in the light of the constraint that morality is subjectively dependent.

#### IV. ASSERTORIC CONTENT

##### 1. Cognitivism And Realism

The aim of this chapter is to elucidate what could be meant by saying that moral judgements are assertoric or factual. I will mainly be concerned with a series of considerations which purportedly show that moral discourse, along with any other discourse which exhibits a certain minimum degree of discipline and a small set of syntactic features characteristic of indicative statements, is at least minimally truth-apt. If successful, these considerations would establish a limited form of cognitivism about moral judgements, understood in the sense of the claim that we can hold some cognitive attitude toward moral claims. Moral judgements are cognitive in their aspiration in that they aim toward truth and falsity. This claim does not entail that moral judgements are ever true or that we do possess moral knowledge. Firstly, moral judgements could, as a rule, be false. Secondly, the force of the claim that a moral judgement is true depends on how the notion of truth is understood. If truth is construed in a minimalist sense to be specified below, then it is arguable that truth and knowledge do indeed follow, given natural assumptions (Wright, 1992). But if truth is construed in a more substantive sense, as given by Wiggins's list in Chapter III, then

it seems likely that moral judgements do fail some of the requirements of truth. Henceforth I will regard the satisfaction of all the requirements of substantial truth as the criterion of realism for a given class of judgements.

It is clear that the issues of moral cognitivism and moral realism are logically distinct. One could be a cognitivist about moral judgements but uncertain as to whether moral realism was true. Therefore it is not necessary to argue for a moral realist position if one wishes to be a moral cognitivist. Whereas a moral realist would claim that moral judgements aim to be true in virtue of substantial facts which actually obtain, a moral anti-realist of the cognitivist variety would have several options. Firstly, he could think that moral judgements are false because they aim at but fail to attain to substantive truth (Mackie,1977). This claim is about the justification of moral judgements, and is thus external to the theory of content. But he could also think that moral judgements do not aim at substantive truth and that they could nevertheless admit of cognitively distinguishable degrees of justification. The cognitivism which I wish to examine in this chapter asserts that moral judgements have only a minimal degree of assertoric content in such a way that even if they are minimally true they do not pick out any substantive facts or properties in the world (Wright,1992).

## 2. Assertoric Minimalism

The aim of the considerations which I will now discuss is to make redundant a certain non-cognitivist project which attempts to explain how moral discourse can display features characteristic of truth-apt discourse without being a factual discourse. Minimalism aims to give an account of truth which contains none of the presuppositions which have led non-cognitivist to deny that moral judgements aim at truth. I will maintain that although the idea of minimal assertoric content does offer a genuine candidate for a weak cognitivism about moral judgements, it is insufficient to undermine a form of non-cognitivism which has resources to accommodate the assertoric features of moral judgements. Such a view could claim that minimal assertoricity, even if adequate to capture the basic content of what moral judgements say, does not fully explain what is involved in a moral judgement or what it is to make a moral judgement. In other words, a minimalist theory of moral truth might suffice for a basic theory of the content of moral judgements, but is insufficient to supply a substantive, full or explanatory theory of content for such judgements.

The idea that a discourse might be minimally truth-apt is developed by Crispin Wright (Wright, 1992). Wright takes as his starting point what he regards as the major insight of a deflationary theory of truth. Such a theory claims that in general the concept of truth can be adequately explicated solely by reference to the following schema: 'P' is true if and only if P (Disquotational Schema (DS)). If this is true it would appear to

follow that the concept of truth does not intrinsically contain any significant degree of metaphysical content, and therefore that to say that a discourse is truth-apt is not to make any significant metaphysical claims about the subject matter of that discourse. In particular, to claim that a discourse is truth-apt is not to commit oneself either to realism or anti-realism about that discourse. Wright wishes to maintain that any discourse which exhibits a certain degree of discipline, and which has certain basic syntactic features common to indicative language, can have a truth-predicate defined for it. Wright's claim is that a discourse which exhibits the features of surface syntactic singular reference, firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use of its ingredient sentences, and the syntactic trappings of assertoric content such as conditionalization, negation and embedding within propositional attitude ascriptions etc. is expressive of genuine assertions. To acquire a truth-predicate such a discourse must be susceptible to having defined for it a predicate satisfying a list of seven a priori laws: 1) DS. 2) To assert is to present as true. 3) To every assertible content there corresponds an assertoric negation. 4) A content is true where it corresponds to the facts, says things as they are etc. (where these features are to be taken as metaphysically neutral platitudes). 5) Truth and warranted assertability come apart (P can be true but not warrantably assertible and P can be warrantably assertible but not true). 6) There is no more or less true (truth is absolute). 7) If P is ever true, then P is always true (truth is stable). There is nothing more to a discourse being assertoric, even

though additional salient features might be added for different types of discourse. But that a discourse is assertoric and can therefore have a truth-predicate defined for it does not entail that any of the statements within that discourse attain to even a minimal form of truth.

One way to cash out the distinction between minimal truth and substantial truth is as follows. The idea of minimalist truth is this: A class of statements is true only if there would be a tendency, in suitable circumstances, for competent subjects to agree on the truth or falsity of members of that class. Wright compares this notion of minimal truth to the following notion of substantial truth: A class of statements is substantially true only if for each statement of that class, competent subjects would agree on its truth or falsity in suitable circumstances. The relevant notion of suitable circumstances is functionally defined. If two devices function to produce representations of a certain kind, then they will produce the same outputs except in three kinds of circumstance: a) they have different inputs, b) they operate under different conditions or c) at least one device is malfunctioning. Given that these are the only possible situations in which the devices in question will produce differing outputs, one may now ask whether for competent moral judges in suitable circumstances there will be the kind of agreement on every possible moral judgement, as the requirement of substantial truth demands, or whether for some subclass of moral judgements competent judges might disagree. It is certainly not obvious that there will be such



agreement for all moral judgements. A minimalist truth-predicate might nevertheless be apt to secure minimal truth for moral judgements, since moral discourse is plausibly regarded as satisfying the assertoricity conditions 1) through 7) and the condition of minimal truth. Wright believes that moral discourse does satisfy these conditions.

One consequence of minimalism is the possibility of divergent truth-predicates across varying kinds of discourse. A realist view of a certain discourse would be the result of belief in the satisfaction of additional features of the truth-predicate in question, such as more substantial forms of correspondence, representation or facts, or explanatory features such as how central the discourse in question is to the determination of what there is in general. Minimalist truth is consistent with subjectively dependent truth and with a projectivist construal of moral discourse considered within an assertoric framework. In other words, moral judgements might be claims to truth which attain to minimal truth even if there are no moral facts in any substantively metaphysical sense.

The controversial elements of assertoric minimalism are these: i) the discipline of a discourse ensures that the judgements involved in that discourse have determinate (truth-evaluable) contents and ii) it is by syntactic features alone that contents are to be classified as assertoric. Assertoric minimalism about moral discourse is meant to ensure that moral judgements have the properties of a) being true or false, b) not

exhibiting systematic error, c) not being the masked expression of emotions or other affective states and d) referring in a minimal way to 'moral' facts. Minimalism is thus meant to displace any error-theory such as Mackie's and any expressivist non-cognitivism.

If moral judgements are merely minimally assertoric, then the following conclusions can be drawn about the status of moral beliefs: 1) Nothing can be inferred about the status of moral progress regarded from a non-moral or morally neutral point of view; morality is not guaranteed an external sanction. 2) An improvement in moral opinion cannot be seen without further argument as independent of refined subjective sensibilities. Moral opinion is thus to some extent relative. The competent moral subjects are the subjects who are competent regarded from the point of view of a moral practice. 3) Moral judgements cannot without further argument be regarded as representational in any substantive sense. 4) Minimal truth does not guarantee cognitive reproachability in the light of disagreement.

Given these facts one can see that the core of a minimalist account of moral judgements is that it takes at face value the fact that moral discourse contains judgements that are expressed in the indicative mood, appearing to attribute features to things; that it consists partly of significant deliberation and argument; that people are regarded as mistaken and correctable in their moral opinions, and that people feel

constrained by their best moral judgements in thought and action. Wright attempts to give moral judgements a content corresponding to the form which they are given in the language in which they are expressed, but a content that is so thin that no significant metaphysical conclusions can be immediately drawn from it.

Assertoric content for moral judgements implies the conceivability of moral facts in a minimalist sense. If at least thin and practical moral judgements have assertoric content, then some moral judgements have assertoric non-descriptive content and there might be evaluative and normative facts in a minimal sense of fact indicated by the DS. Minimalism leaves open the possibility of construing truth as whatever one is aiming at in making judgements in any discourse that satisfies the minimal constraints. This would seem to shift the emphasis of debate from the issue of truth-aptness to the issue of X-aptness, where X stands for whatever problematic feature the judgements in the discourse aim for, be it convergence, representation, response-independence or whatnot. A minimalist theory of moral judgements should fix on some such feature as the relevant aim for moral judgements and give an account of how judgements with a specifically evaluative or normative content can aim for such a property (Wright,1988).

### 3. Minimalism and Quasi-Realism

The minimalist theory of assertoric content is meant to displace any account which explains the content of moral judgements as the expression of an affective state (Wright, 1992 (pp.35-36)). But it is not clear that the considerations present in Wright's discussion are sufficient to rule out such an account. By considering the elements of Simon Blackburn's quasi-realist and projectivist account of moral judgements, I think it can be shown that satisfaction of the minimalist platitudes is consistent with a non-cognitivist theory of moral judgements, even if non-cognitivism is inconsistent with assertoric minimalism (Blackburn, 1984).

One reading of Blackburn's theory takes it to explain the content of moral judgements or beliefs with reference to subjective attitudes and responses. This non-cognitive feature of moral judgements is not present at the most superficial level of moral thought and discourse but lies hidden underneath a cognitivist or realist grammar. A quasi-realist project accounts for moral judgements in a way that makes them function as if they were cognitive, where their cognitive surface structure masks the projection of subjective attitudes onto the world. According to Blackburn the use of moral language in a cognitivist form is explicable as a feature of a pragmatical need to work out the implications of affective commitments in a disciplined way. Moral thinking works to develop a moral sensibility, defined as a faculty in agents which produces affective attitudes and responses as outputs from genuine beliefs about the world or other affective attitudes as inputs. The

endorsement of moral claims in indicative and conditional form thus serves to define moral points of view. Moral sensibilities are rejected if they are illogical or if they cannot adequately serve the practical purposes for which people morally evaluate things.

The power of this understanding of moral judgements is partly to be found in the fact that allegedly all natural devices used for debating truth for factual judgements are applied to the debating of moral judgements. Moral discourse operates with a notion of Constructed Truth. Constructed truth is rooted in subjective sources of preference and response which determine the possible definitions of improvement and coherence within a particular practice of making judgements. Quasi-realist truth would thus claim that moral discourse satisfies the same constraints of discipline as are present in minimalism. Quasi-realist truth actually corresponds with minimalist truth to the extent that its definition of truth as a state of maximal improvement could be understood as the indefeasibility of an assertoric judgement in the light of further information (Blackburn,1984; Wright,1992). Quasi-realism offers an interpretation of determined truth for the case of moral judgements, and is thus consistent with assertoric minimalism in claiming that a notion of truth for moral judgements does not entail anything about the existence of moral facts in any metaphysically significant sense. Blackburn makes the point that we are constrained to argue as though there is truth and that truth is single, even if we believe that moral truth is a mind-

dependent projection.

There are at least two points on which assertoric minimalism and quasi-realism differ. The first is the issue of expressivism, which assertoric minimalism is meant to banish from a theory of content. The second is the issue of projectivism. Here the case is less clear. Whereas it seems plain that one motivation for quasi-realism was the task of accounting for moral discourse in the light of the conviction that there are no substantial moral facts, it does not seem that minimalism can be easily understood as either in essential agreement or in essential disagreement with this claim. It is possible that Wright's notion of determined truth is meant to capture, at least in part, what Blackburn aims to capture by his notion of projection (Chapter III). On the other hand, Wright does not appear to be very impressed with the negative metaphysical considerations of factuality which seem to motivate Blackburn. It is tempting to construe minimalism with determined truth as a more modest alternative to projectivism, on which the notion of projection loses whatever metaphysical significance it might have been thought to possess.

Quasi-realist truth is meant to be ordinary truth (Blackburn,1984). Blackburn aims to give moral judgements a standard truth-conditional semantic treatment while at the same time not asserting that moral truth is a matter of the detection of moral properties. Truth and falsity are a matter of more or less endorsable sensibilities, not a matter of the better

or worse tracking of facts. One irreducible difference between assertoric minimalism and quasi-realism is that although they might both operate with a notion of truth as what is judged to be the case in a state of indefeasible conviction, whereas assertoric minimalism construes this as a cognitive state of belief that there is cause for commitment, quasi-realism construes it as an affective state, an attitude or commitment. Thus both minimalism and quasi-realism attribute to moral judgements a cognitivist syntax and semantics, but whereas minimalism takes these features to determine the content of the judgements in question, quasi-realism claims that all moral judgements, insofar as they are distinctively normative or evaluative, require a non-cognitivist account of their full content, as would be revealed by explanatory analysis.

As is shown by the example of quasi-realism, non-cognitivism can allow that moral judgements are in some sense assertoric, namely in that they can be said to satisfy a narrow or minimalist truth-predicate representing whatever is aimed at in making moral judgements. However, a non-cognitivist theory of content must maintain that the satisfaction of Wright's minimal constraints is insufficient to rule out a deeper construal of moral judgements as non-cognitive. If the insights behind the idea of projection can be captured by the notion of determined truth, then it must be the expressivist aspect of non-cognitivism which assertoric minimalism is said to miss. Wright's argument relies on a controversial premise which he claims to derive from Frege, namely the contention

that an expression's candidacy to refer to an object is a matter of its syntax alone (Wright,1983). Wright takes this claim to substantiate the view that all there is to determining the content of a certain judgement is determining its surface or grammatical features. This claim requires independent support. With respect to the content of moral judgements the plausibility of the claim can only be assessed by how well assertoric minimalism can account for the non-descriptive and evaluative content of moral judgements, and by how such an account could deal with the insights normally thought to favour a non-cognitivist theory. Unfortunately, Wright supplies only the bare foundations of such an account, such as arguing that moral judgements involve some form of endorsement (Wright,1988).

There are two considerations which might be added to Wright's claims and which might be thought to deal with the challenge of insufficiency. Firstly, one might appeal to the notion of content itself. The content of a judgement is sometimes explained as what a speaker or thinker (tacitly) grasps when he understands that judgement (Dummett,1978). What is required to understand a moral judgement? It seems clear that speakers in general see themselves fit to make moral judgements without having worked out any substantial theory of the content of moral judgements. One also regards oneself as understanding moral judgements and what they claim antecedently to meta-ethical discussion. In having a moral judgement explained to one it is in general enough to



have the judgement put in assertoric form. It thus seems that there is a clear candidate for the content of moral judgements which satisfies the minimalist constraints but which does not add up to anything as substantial as quasi-realist content insofar as that requires for its full explanation the mention of some affective state. So why does one need a more substantial notion of content, corresponding to the idea of a full or adequate theoretical understanding of the content of moral judgements?

To this Blackburn might reply that if an explanatory theory requires such a notion, then such a notion is required. Only with reference to subjective states can we give sense to moral judgements. This claim could be supported by the thesis that there is an order of dependence between the content of intentional mental states and the judgements which express them, such that the content of a judgement is parasitic on the content of the mental state it expresses. Blackburn has a theory of moral psychology whereby moral beliefs are or contain desires (Blackburn, 1984; Chapter II). Desires are not beliefs, therefore moral judgements cannot have the content appropriate to the expressions of beliefs. He might agree that we have a narrower concept of content, but then the situation remains the same, since the issue is still one of the explanatory sufficiency of assertoric minimalism. Admittedly, if someone makes a moral judgement to the effect that a certain action is required in a certain situation, it may be informative for that person to be told that

he is only expressing his state of mind, and not aiming to point to any fact about the situation. It is intelligible that the person who made that judgement would deny that this was what he was saying at all. Rather, he was simply pointing out what the situation requires. But this kind of case may arise for any non-transparent philosophical analysis. Hence, what Blackburn needs to account for is how it can be true that we speak as if there are moral facts while at the same time we are not engaged in make-believe. It is a plausible constraint on activities of make-believe that those involved know that make-believe and not real assertion is going on. This cannot be the case on a quasi-realist account of moral judgements. Blackburn is constrained to say that insofar as one regards oneself as making genuine assertions in moral discussion one is having a poor theory of what one is doing (Blackburn,1985). Presumably, one does not know that one is expressing a state of mind rather than asserting that something is the case. On this issue quasi-realism looks underdeveloped.

The second consideration which can be used to support the assertoric minimalist is the claim that quasi-realism is not to be understood as a theory of content at all, contrary to what Wright seems to indicate (Wright,1992 (pp.35-36)). If one regards Blackburn as giving a theory of content roughly corresponding to assertoric minimalism, then one can claim that the expressive and non-cognitivist aspects of moral judgement are to be revealed by the theories of function and justification: moral

judgements function to express subjective attitudes and/or cannot be justified in such a way as to merit talk of moral properties. This strategy would remove any obvious conflict between assertoric minimalism and quasi-realism. Moral judgements would now have a metaphysically neutral content, but a full theory of moral judgements would not be metaphysically neutral.

It is unhelpful to regard quasi-realism as giving a cognitivist theory of content within a framework of an overall non-cognitivist theory of moral judgements. Blackburn's projectivism entails that it is a feature of moral judgements that we speak as if there were values. But if this is possible, and moral judgements have cognitive content, then it must be conceivable that there are values. Now, either the cognitive content of moral judgement is minimalist or it is more substantial. If it is more substantial, then quasi-realism must explain how there could have been values even if there in fact are none. On this view it is tempting to conclude that moral claims as a rule are false. Therefore, if quasi-realism is purely a theory of function and justification it appears to entail an error-theory for moral judgements. If the cognitive content of moral judgements is minimalist, on the other hand, then it seems that there is no need for projectivism, since we are not even speaking as if something exists which is not really there. Hence, if one wishes to construe moral judgements as rational, while holding on to quasi-realism and projectivism, then an expressivist account of content seems natural and

looks like a more accurate representation of Blackburn's position. It is most natural to locate the dispute between Wright and Blackburn within the theory of content: Wright regards satisfaction of the minimalist platitudes as sufficient to merit an explanation of the content of moral judgements in terms of what is the case, whereas Blackburn regards the connection between moral judgements and the mental states which they express as what provides the explanation of those contents. In the absence of a strong argument on Wright's behalf that Blackburn is mistaken on this point, it must be concluded that assertoricity in the minimalist sense is insufficient to make redundant a non-cognitivist explanation of the content of moral judgements.

#### 4. Minimalism And External Sanction

Wright's minimalism allows that moral thinking takes the form of a search for correct answers. A correct moral opinion is an opinion that is (at least) irreproachable in light of the discipline internal to moral discourse. But moral judgements also possess a further constitutive feature on this view: moral claims are by necessity claims to uniqueness. According to Wright, it is not a reason to tolerate a conflicting moral judgement that it is from a neutral or non-moral standpoint as equally well maintained as one's own. There is no practical option of withdrawal of moral judgements in this way without exiting from the institution of moral practice. That one's moral stand has no overall disputational

supremacy cannot be a sufficient reason to abandon one's view, since that would make it impossible to take a moral stand at all, given the fact that morality does not have an external sanction. Wright claims that this feature of moral thinking is accounted for by the fact that moral judgements are essentially practical.

While I agree that the action-guiding nature of moral considerations constrains the morally possible positions one might hold on a certain issue, I fail to be convinced that everything that could be said from a non-moral point of view must be regarded as irrelevant to one's moral verdict. Firstly, it might be consistent to reject some judgements made from a moral point of view on the grounds that they conflict with judgements made from a point of view regarded as the rational point of view. For example, one could imagine an individual losing his confidence in some of his moral beliefs for the reason that he suspects that those beliefs are dependent on the existence of certain sympathies for others which it might be more rational to do without. A father might lose his faith in a certain type of moral education for this reason without totally rejecting the moral point of view. Secondly, one might reject one moral conviction in favour of another on the grounds that the rejected conviction presupposed an unjustified metaphysical claim, such as the thesis of the freedom of the will. At this point it is unclear in what sense moral judgements are independent of external sanction. It is not consistent with moral discourse to regard the standards of moral

correctness as something one could stipulate, as one might stipulate the correct moves within a boardgame. If this is all the discipline minimalism commits one to, then minimalism is too insubstantial to capture the content of at least some moral judgements.

### 5. Minimalism And Contestability

Wright endorses the view that moral judgements are essentially practical in the sense that to make a moral judgement is to acknowledge a cause for concern (Wright, 1988; Chapter II). He is thus committed to hold that a minimalist truth-predicate can be constructed for judgements which are governed by the constraints of at least reasons internalism (Chapter II). Wright's prime candidate for a minimalist truth-predicate is the predicate he calls Superassertability, meaning an indefeasible state of conviction. This predicate, which closely resembles Dancy's notion of objectivity derived from Nagel (Dancy, 1993; Chapter III), is an essentially epistemically constrained truth-predicate such that if P is superassertible, then it is possible to arrive at the indefeasible state of information that makes it so. It is also an internal property of statements, such that it can be seen as a projection of the standards which inform assertion within the discourse in question. It is thus meant to be metaphysically neutral, in line with the core idea of minimalism. It is natural to take Wright to be claiming that any discourse satisfying the requirements of minimalism will contain judgements for which superassertability is an appropriate truth-

predicate. How does this claim fare when applied to moral judgements?

On Wright's view moral judgements satisfy the constraint that S is true if and only if S is knowable to be true. This entails that it is a priori that each stateable truth can in suitable circumstances be recognized as such. Wright also holds that if S is knowable then S is superassertable. It follows from this that to assert that a moral judgement is true is to assert that it is superassertable. Superassertability is epistemically constrained, so if S is superassertable then S is knowable. Wright claims it follows from this that to assert that a moral judgement is superassertable is to assert that it is true. So Wright is committed to the claims that a) to assert a moral judgement is to assert that one would hold to it in an indefeasible state of conviction and b) to assert that one would hold to a moral judgement in an indefeasible state of conviction is to assert that moral judgement. But Wright also holds that it is an irreducibly moral question whether a certain state of conviction is indefeasible or not (Wright,1988). What effect does this claim have on the exact nature of the truth-predicate that is suitable for moral judgements?

The irreducibly moral nature of the question of what circumstances or states of information generate superassertable judgements has two immediate consequences. Firstly, that a moral judgement will be held to in the light of any further non-moral or descriptive information does not

mean that it is inconsistent to reject that judgement (Wright does not anywhere argue for a thesis of supervenience). Secondly and consequently, the extension of moral concepts cannot be accounted for a priori by reference to such conditions. It follows that moral truth is not determined in the same way as truth about secondary quality ascriptions has been taken to be (Wright,1988). This raises a question of how superassertability for moral judgements is to be specified, in particular about how one is to understand the idea of information in the light of which a true judgement is stable. It seems to be insufficient, given the above considerations, to construe this notion purely descriptively or in non-moral terms. Thus it has been claimed that it is both consistent and readily intelligible to claim eg. that in an indefeasible state of descriptive (or non-evaluative) information I would judge that I had better do X, and still judge that I had better not do X (Moore,1903; Gibbard,1992). One example might be the civil servant who thinks that in the state of indefeasible descriptive information he would turn corrupt (Gibbard, 1990). If superassertability for moral judgements has to be descriptively understood, then both Wright's claims a) and b) above would fail to hold on this view. It is thus natural to suggest either that superassertability is not a candidate for a truth-predicate for moral discourse, or that superassertability for moral judgements should be defined in such a way as to make it normatively contestable how it is to be specified. Moral truth would then be given by a property of stability in the light of moral reflection, a property which could only be determined by engagement in



evaluative moral thought. In that case the notion of superassertability for moral judgements is a more complex one than the superassertability characteristic of minimalist truth in general, and an informative characterization of the former property requires an independent theory of moral justification.

## 6 Conclusion

Minimalist truth, adequately supplemented, is a genuine candidate for a truth-predicate for moral judgements. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether this shows that non-cognitivism is in any way redundant as a theory of the content of moral judgements. In what follows I firstly examine how cognitivism might best hope to supplement the insights of minimalism. I argue that one modest attempt to do this looks problematic (Chapter V). Secondly, I examine what I take to be the best and most detailed attempt to give a non-cognitivist account of the content of moral judgements (Chapter VI). I shall claim that non-cognitivism can be reconciled with the insights of minimalism and that it offers additional insights into the nature of moral claims which minimalism in itself does not account for. Some of these insights might properly belong to the theory of function or justification, but it is not clear that all of them are external to a theory of the content of moral judgements.

## V. COGNITIVISM AND EVALUATIVE CONTENT

### 1. Minimalism And Cognitivism

The distinguishing features of minimalism are that it is supposed to be metaphysically neutral and that it seeks to determine the content of certain judgements on the basis of a minimal set of facts about the syntax and argumentative discipline of a discourse. One can thus call minimalism a form of cognitivism as long as one distinguishes it from a cognitivism with metaphysical content. One crucial issue now, given that minimalism seems insufficient to displace non-cognitivism about moral judgements, is whether minimalist cognitivism might be supplemented in such a way as to make possible an account which gives the full content of moral judgements without explaining it in terms of the expression of affective states. In this chapter I examine one line of thought which might be seen as such an attempt, namely the line of thought developed by David Wiggins and which I shall call Sensible Subjectivism (Wiggins, 1987;1990/91). I will claim that sensible subjectivism can be seen as a way of filling out the idea that moral claims are minimally assertoric but that it a) does not secure a more substantial notion of truth for moral judgements and b) is not sufficient to rule out a 'deeper-level' non-cognitivism.

## 2. Sensible Subjectivism

The cognitivist lines of thought presented by Wiggins variously combine three different claims. Firstly, moral judgements aim at truth and knowledge. Secondly, moral claims sometimes attain to truth and knowledge. And thirdly, the facts that value is in some sense invented and that the mind is 'spread' onto the world are not incompatible with value being discovered in the world. Wiggins claims that at least some moral judgements, namely judgements of moral value, are a species of factual judgement, and that the fact that ends are supplied by subjective concerns not perceived or determined by the intellect does not automatically render the value judgements relating to those ends unsuitable for truth-aptness or knowability. One target for Wiggins's argument is a non-cognitivism which takes the response-dependence and subjective source of moral judgements to substantiate a view of value as merely instrumental and directed solely at the satisfaction of desire.

Wiggins recognizes the following two restrictions on cognitivism about moral judgements: a) the verdicts of judgements from the moral point of view cannot be said to answer to how things are independently of that point of view and b) the significance attributed to human life by moral judgements is rooted in something arbitrary and unreasoned. With respect to truth Wiggins thinks that practical moral judgements and

moral value judgements may come apart. For general moral questions concerning what to do there may be no guarantee that considered opinion will converge, whereas for questions of moral value there exist constraints of point of view, concerns and intelligibility of judgement which narrow down the possibility of disagreement. This claim should not conflict with the view that the fact that a certain action is morally worthless, for example, provides reason not to perform that action. Given reasons internalism there will be a two-way conceptual link between judgements of moral value and judgements as to what to do. In the end, however, reasons do not offer a unified guide to living. Wiggins's account of moral justification attributes to moral judgements the property of being cognitively underdetermined.

Wiggins offers a brief sketch of how moral judgements may come to possess a form of anthropocentric objectivity. Objects and events that regularly affect people in similar ways are grouped together because they are such as to affect people in these recognizable ways. Often there may be no useful way of picking out these objects and events independently of reference to how they affect people. The properties which the collective terms for these objects and events putatively pick out will thus be properties explicable only with reference to subjective reactions. Wiggins claims that moral value-terms can be seen to have developed in this way. But not only do the properties in question have to be elucidated with reference to subjective reactions. The characteristic

subjective reactions in question may have to be explained in turn with reference to the relevant properties, since there may be no other adequate way of understanding them. This explanatory circle implies that there can be no reduction of moral predicates to 'natural' or response-independent predicates.

Increased detail in mastery of moral concepts yields increased discriminatory powers with respect to moral properties. Tests of improvement of opinion will be possible internal to a practice based on common sensitivities. An increase in cognitive and affective sensibility yields more discriminatory powers of criticism and understanding, which again may yield finer sensitivities and so on. In this way Wiggins claims that the standards of moral judgement become independent to a significant degree of immediate and unreflective responses. The anthropocentric moral properties take on a life of their own, and it is the role of moral judgements to track them. On this view moral justification is a matter of discriminating between what Wiggins calls property/response pairs. A morally defensible property/response is the result of a selection process where the property/response pairs that survive are those that are susceptible to refinement and amplification. As a result of such refinement, it is possible to discover new moral properties at a large distance from the roots of moral practice. Moral values are the product of an evolutionary chain of increasingly reflective responses and anthropocentric properties mutually adjusted. It can

therefore be said that values are things that matter to us because they are values. So subjective responses and morally significant properties are in some important way reciprocally dependent. We desire a certain outcome because it is good. But equally, that outcome is good because we desire it. Wiggins says that moral responses and properties are 'made' for each other.

### 3. Sensible Subjectivism And Content

Wiggins maintains that a moral judgement is the result of moral qualities impinging upon the human sentiments and on the intellect simultaneously. To judge that an object has a certain moral quality is to judge that something exists in the object made for the sentiment it would occasion in the morally qualified judge. Moral reflection does not proceed by fixing on a certain object and asking what kind of response it will evoke; rather, it proceeds by fixing on a subjective response and asking what kind of property such a response is 'made' for. It then becomes contestable what a thing has to be like to have a certain moral property, ie. what kinds of objects and events are suitable to produce the response in question. To justify a moral response one will appeal to a suitable property of an object or event, and to justify the attribution of a moral property to an object or event one will appeal to the response it makes appropriate. This model of moral reflection results in attributing three core features to moral thought: i) fixed attitudes of moral

commitments and sentiments, ii) identification of properties by the response/property ties and, iii) contestability of the marks for moral properties. The contestability in question is meant to be in tune with the claim made in Chapter IV about the irreducibly moral character of the question as to what the appropriate circumstances of good moral judgement are. For Wiggins, the feature of essential contestability is a direct consequence of the fact that the practice of engaging in moral thought is itself evaluational with respect to the predicates and judgements which that practice contains. The notion of the morally qualified judge therefore has an irreducibly moral and evaluational content and could not be specified in non-moral terms.

Wiggins offers two alternative formulations of what it is for a moral judgement to be true: X is morally F if it is such as to make appropriate reactions  $f(1\dots n)$  among those sensitive to Fs, or X is morally F if and only if x is the sort of thing that calls forth and makes appropriate reactions  $f(1\dots n)$ , given the range of propensities we actually have (Wiggins, 1987(Essay V)). It can be seen here that the relativity of value is the relativity of response propensities, and that in the second and more detailed formulation this relativity is rigidified to the actual nature of moral agents. It is now open for Wiggins to claim that to understand a moral judgement is to understand what it is for it to be true. Wiggins has later refined his notion of truth for moral judgements to include the

claim that to say that something is morally F is to say that there is nothing else to think than that it is F, where to think otherwise would be to opt out of the point of view that gives sense to the issue in question or to make a mistake (Wiggins,1990/91). The criteria for knowledge of the moral truth that something is F are now expressed in the following way: the standards internal to moral practice M entail that it is F; someone, A, has followed those standards and has arrived at the belief that it is F; therefore A knows that it is F.

On sensible subjectivism the content of moral judgements is essentially tied to subjective responses in such a way that there is a one to one correspondence between moral sentiments and the thoughts that sustain them. Moral commitments are in part affective states that can be justified by judgements of a cognitive character, the aim of which is to cause agreement in isolating suitable pairs of sentiments and intersubjectively discernible features of the world. These judgements are regulated by the standards determined by a communal point of view and by which moral judgements command collective confidence. The claim involved in moral judgements is this: Some object of appraisal X is such that it makes morally appropriate some response R. This claim is a claim to truth and fact, which presupposes facts about affective responses, but which does not include such facts or responses as part of its content. There is only a general basis in affect which any particular moral judgement is consequential upon.



There now appear to be two distinct candidates for the title of moral belief: i) a moral commitment or sentiment and ii) the holding to of a thought that aims to justify a commitment or sentiment. The second of these seems better suited as a moral belief in the sense in which I have used this term. It may seem that Wiggins agrees when he says that moral beliefs are states of finding that an object X deserves a certain response F, or states of valuing X as having value V (Wiggins, 1990/91). But the case is made more complicated by his definition of a moral response as a state which expresses sentiments by representing objects as thus and so and as having certain features that merit a certain response (Wiggins,1990/91). If read literally as a claim about moral judgements this definition appears close to quasi-realism and the type of account which Wright wishes to displace, since it includes essentially the notion of expression as well as the notion of representation (Blackburn,1984; Wright,1992). It may therefore be natural to avoid taking a moral judgement as a moral response in this sense. If moral judgements express moral beliefs and moral judgements are not moral responses in this sense, then it might nevertheless be the case that moral judgements enter as part of moral responses in the form of thoughts with a cognitive content that aim to justify sentiments and commitments. However, it is not clear that this interpretation is true to Wiggins's account. It is possible that Wiggins regards moral judgements as moral responses, since he could regard subject-dependence and the constraints of internalism as requiring some expressivist element in

moral judgements and nevertheless regard the content of moral judgements as cognitive. If so, then Wiggins would be committed either to explain the expressivist element of moral judgements by giving a theory of function, or to give an account of content whereby the content of moral judgements can be explained with reference to representation and expression at the same time. The latter alternative seems closer to Wiggins's intentions.

#### 4. The Limits Of Sensible Subjectivism

Sensible subjectivism provides a legitimate framework for an account of the content of moral value judgements in seeking to be consistent with both the claims that morality is a cultural artifact and that morality can provide us with knowledge of moral truths. Wiggins's main concern is to provide moral judgements with a truth-predicate which some of them can be seen to satisfy, as a result of which his account mainly faces problems within the theory of justification. I will now briefly mention some such problems which may have an impact on the theory of content.

The crucial limitation of Wiggins's theory is this: The definitions of truth and knowledge given by sensible subjectivism are internal to the particular point of view of a moral practice and its background of evaluative standards. As a consequence of this, moral truth fails Wright's criterion of substantial truth (Chapter IV). Wiggins's account does not

guarantee any external or non-moral sanction for any particular moral practice, as a result of which moral truth looks like no more than minimal truth. This fact makes it unclear whether any talk of substantial moral properties or representation can be justified, since it is a feature of minimalism that it is meant to be metaphysically neutral (Wright,1992). Wiggins does attempt to provide a case for the existence of moral properties when he claims that moral properties and responses form an explanatory circle such that moral properties cannot be adequately explained without reference to moral responses, and moral responses cannot be adequately explained except with reference to moral properties (Wiggins,1987(Essay V)). But this claim is explicitly denied by anti-realist non-cognitivism, which may accept that moral 'properties' are essentially definable with reference to moral responses, but which is committed to deny that the best, complete or adequate explanation of a moral response will mention any moral properties or facts. The non-cognitivist claims that there are independent explanations of why people exhibit moral responses (Blackburn,1984; Gibbard,1990). This issue can only be resolved by an overall theory of morality which includes a full account of the metaphysics of moral judgement, and is thus beyond the scope of the present essay. A full answer to the non-cognitivist challenge would require a demonstration that there is an explanatory circle in the sense Wiggins requires, and that such a circle allows one to distinguish between moral sensibilities. No such demonstration is given by Wiggins.

As regards the content of moral judgements it is not obvious that such judgements are restricted in what they claim to what Wiggins thinks is attainable in terms of justification. It is central to the notion of moral truth included in sensible subjectivism that it is internal to a moral practice or community. However, it is not clear that a claim which demands acceptance beyond such a community or practice, say of the whole community of human agents at any time, is for that reason non-moral. It may therefore be true that some moral judgements aspire beyond what Wiggins regards as justifiable from a moral point of view and that a substantial portion of our moral outlook will turn out to be misguided in principle.

A similar difficulty which faces Wiggins's account results from his claim that moral judgements are essentially contestable (Chapter IV). If moral judgements possess this feature, then there can be no non-question-begging demonstration that the moral judgements that survive reflection are the best ones. At first sight this is evidence that moral judgements are not really cognitive and that there is an alternative explanation in the form of a theory like quasi-realism. One motivation for sensible subjectivism was the wish to provide a more substantial notion of correctness in moral issues than could be provided by the resources of consistency and instrumentalist decision theory alone. But given essential contestability there does not seem to be any non-moral or non-circular way of showing that there is a case for such a substantial notion

of moral reasons. This is evidence that moral thinking leaves open to many sustainable positions for moral judgements to be given a substantial cognitivist account. Again, problems within a theory of justification are evidence that moral judgements should be given a non-cognitivist theory of content. This problem also faces Wright's argument, as it is not clear how minimalism can account for normative precedence between practices of evaluation.

It is thus clear that Wiggins's account does not show that moral truth is more substantial than minimal truth. Since minimal truth is insufficient to rule out a non-cognitivism like quasi-realism, it is clear that Wiggins's argument cannot rule out such an account either. The account is therefore underdetermined by the evidence, a final decision as to its adequacy depending on further development or a full and explanatory theory of moral judgements.

## 5. Conclusion

Moral beliefs are intentional states. The ascription of such beliefs follows the general constraints of propositional attitude ascriptions. These facts place some restraints on a theory of content for moral judgements. Furthermore, the making of a moral judgement entails the grasping and the endorsement of some evaluative content which in a minimal way can be prefaced with the phrase 'It is true that..'. This evaluative content is

subjectively dependent, but should it be explained as a subjective response, an attempt to represent the world as being a certain way, or as somehow a combination of both? One hypothesis which has now emerged is the following: The content of moral judgements is minimally cognitive. To grasp a moral judgement is not just to grasp some subjective response. But in the making of a moral judgement one endorses a moral content, and this involves the subjective responses necessary to satisfy the requirements of motivation internalism (Chapter II). Hence, even if the acceptance of a moral judgement includes some subjective response which might not be capable of absolute non-moral or external sanction and which might be fundamentally explicable as in part a non-cognitive response, it might still be that the content of moral judgements is fundamentally cognitive in the minimal sense. In the next and final chapter I consider the evidence for non-cognitivism about the content of moral judgements and the denial of the sufficiency of minimalist truth for cognitivism about content.

## VI. NON-COGNITIVISM AND EXPRESSIVE CONTENT

### 1. Non-Cognitivism And Expressivism

Non-cognitivism about the content of moral judgement denies that moral judgements are fact-stating judgements in any proper sense. On quasi-realism, as put forward by Blackburn, the notions of truth and knowledge can be seen to come apart from the notion of factuality via a constructivist understanding of moral truth (Blackburn, 1984; Chapter IV). What earns quasi-realism its status as a form of non-cognitivism are its denial that moral judgements have a subject matter of moral facts and properties (anti-realism) and its claim that the assertoric appearance of moral judgement disguises the essentially expressive nature of moral judgement. Expressivism about moral judgement denies that the characteristic role of moral judgement consists in properly asserting that something is the case. Rather, it is the characteristic role of moral judgements that they express subjective states or attitudes by recommending, prescribing, forbidding or cautioning against certain actions, character-traits or states of affairs. On the assumption that minimalism is insufficient to rule out this view, what is the evidence in its favour?

## 2. Motivations For Expressivism

An expressivist account of moral judgement can be motivated by a range of considerations. In Chapter II I discussed one type of argument which has been thought to work in its favour, namely the argument from the motivational role of moral beliefs. It seems clear that this argument cannot displace cognitivism unless supplemented by a true moral psychology. One further motivation for expressivism is that some have thought that assigning moral judgements cognitive content implies that moral judgements are generally erroneous (Blackburn,1985; Gibbard,1990). The crucial component of such arguments has been the metaphysical conviction that there are no moral facts or properties. Non-cognitivism has been regarded as a mandatory option if one wishes to interpret moral judgements as maximally rational according to some principle of charity (Blackburn,1985). Within a larger framework which considers human judgements in general this approach might be advisable. But it is not obvious that the unit of judgements to be considered as maximally rational is moral judgements in isolation. It could be intelligibly claimed that moral judgements are an erroneous component of an overall rational world view (Boghossian and Velleman,1990). In any case, the satisfaction of the constraints of assertoric minimalism might serve to rule out an error-theory for all and only moral judgements which do not presuppose or claim any external sanction (Chapter IV).



Another fact which could be taken to support expressivism is the close link between moral beliefs on the one hand and emotions and other affective human responses on the other (Williams, 1973 (Essay 13)). This fact has led some to identify moral beliefs with such affective responses or dispositions. Such a view can be found explicitly in Blackburn, who seems deliberately to frame his identification of moral beliefs in terms of commitments: 'The commitment that a thing is good or bad, right or wrong, permissible or impermissible, is not a judgement with truth-conditions on its own... it is a commitment of a different sort, maintained not by believing something about it but by having an attitude towards it...' (Blackburn, 1984). A moral sensibility is something that takes factual beliefs as its input and produces affective dispositional states as its output. Like the argument from the motivational implications of moral belief this argument appeals to the psychological role of moral judgements. Moral beliefs are sentiments and moral judgements the expression of these sentiments. Wiggins has put forward reasons to doubt the straightforward identification of moral beliefs with sentiments (Chapter V). Similar considerations can be applied to an expressivist non-cognitivist theory as well. It is consistent with such a view to hold that moral beliefs and sentiments are distinct (Gibbard, 1990). Moral beliefs can be linked to moral sentiments by sometimes being about those sentiments and also standing in causal relations to them since moral beliefs have the characteristic property of producing motivation. But a person who merely acts in certain ways and has certain typical

sentiments may not as such have any moral beliefs. He may only get to have moral beliefs at the moment he puts up his sentiments for reflective scrutiny.

What makes a non-cognitivism about content expressivist? This can be seen most easily by asking what the content of moral judgements is to be explained with reference to (Gibbard, 1990). A common thought is that when a thinker makes a descriptive non-moral judgement he expresses a proposition which aims to stand in a certain relationship with facts in the world: it aims to be true. When a thinker makes a moral judgement, on the other hand, he is expressing a partly motivational state of mind of his own and inviting or pressuring others to share this state of mind with him. The content of a descriptive non-moral judgement can be explicated with reference to ways the world could be. The content of a moral judgement must be explicated with reference to subjective states of mind in a way which a) excludes those judgements being descriptively about such states of mind and b) respects the motivational role of moral judgements. This is the view adopted by Allan Gibbard (Gibbard, 1990).

### 3. Norm Expressivism

Gibbard's norm-expressivism is a theory about what it is to call something rational. We are asked to imagine a language called the Galilean Core. This language includes resources for the description of

all natural facts from physics to common sense medium-sized objects and minds. By taking this language and supplementing it with one single predicate of a distinctively non-descriptive character, Gibbard claims he can capture the content of large sections of evaluative and normative talk. The predicate in question is meant to have an automatically recommending and endorsing force, and is meant to function like some core uses of the phrases "It is rational that...", "It makes sense to...", and the like. Since this predicate is meant to capture the sense of moral judgements, it follows that Gibbard regards moral judgements as a species of rational judgement. Moral judgements in a narrow sense are judgements about what feelings of guilt and resentment it is rational to have. Moral judgements in a wider sense are about what kind of life it makes sense to lead. A moral failure is thus a failure of rationality.

To call something rational on Gibbard's view is to express a state of mind, not to assert that something is the case. Gibbard's account is run in terms of norms. A norm is a possible rule or prescription expressible in the form of an imperative. To call something rational is to express one's acceptance of norms that permit or require something for the circumstances under consideration. A moral belief is thus a state of norm-acceptance, and the content of moral judgements must be explained with reference to the possible states of norm-acceptance these judgements express. Even if moral judgements do not assert the existence of facts, moral discourse still mimics factual discourse in such

a way that the constraints of minimalist truth might be satisfied for moral discourse (Chapter IV). But the realist grammar of moral discourse and the discipline of moral argument are explicable with reference to a wider story of the evolutionary and social pressures which force agents to cooperate. There is no need and no room in this story for moral facts. The theory is thus meant to explain how moral agents can lead normative lives and experience the world in normative terms, even if they live in a value-free world and know this. To lay the foundations for such an explanatory theory Gibbard assumes the correctness of a speculative 'Darwinian' story and a psychology of norm-acceptance, neither of which he independently defends. The Darwinian story represents morality as an upshot of natural selection. The mental states of norm-acceptance, which consists in accepting norms in systematic combinations with factual possibilities, are identifiable psychological states with certain causal and explanatory roles.

Normative thinking has its roots and takes place in a community, and works by individuals taking up positions to pressurize each other towards states of mutually tolerable consensus. The avowal of normative verdicts in such discussion includes a wide range of expressions, such as evincing emotions, expressing hypothetical decisions in words, or labelling actions in emotionally charged terms. To accept a normative judgement is in part to be disposed to avow it in unconstrained discussion, as a result of the pressures internal to this discussion. The

state of accepting a normative judgement is identified by its place in a network of tendencies towards avowal and action. This syndrome is peculiar to organisms which possess a linguistically sensitive system of coordination, a system which allows them to discuss in detail absent situations as well as making delicate adjustments required by what is present to them.

The distinction between present and absent situations helps in explaining the difference between what Gibbard calls internalized norms and accepted norms. The discussion of absent situations as opposed to actual responses elicited to present situations is the main determining factor of attributions of norm-acceptance. An internalized norm is a norm one would act on regardless of what one accepted, and is therefore too crude to be identified with a moral belief. Norm acceptance, on the other hand, does possess the necessary complexity to qualify as moral belief. The psychological and conceptual tendency to conform to norms accepted and thus to internalize those norms Gibbard calls the syndrome of normative governance.

The psychology included in norm-expressivism is meant to explain the tie between moral judgements and moral sentiments. Ordinarily in making a moral judgement there will be a tendency to act and feel in accordance with it. It is therefore natural to take the feelings felt as registering the content of the moral judgements they are associated with.

One will say that one feels anger because one is confronted with something meriting anger. One thereby accords authority to one's feelings as good evidence for a corresponding moral judgement, to oneself in experiencing such feelings, and to the judgements one makes when such feelings are had. These connections are defeasible and do not lead to an identification between moral belief and sentiments. Moral beliefs must be explained with reference to the syndromes of normative avowal and governance, and ultimately with reference to the benefits these systems bring to schemes of cooperation. This account thus offers an explanatory account of the All-other-things-being-equal component of motivation internalism without identifying moral beliefs with affective states such as desires (Chapter II). In Gibbard's own words a state of norm-acceptance is a 'thought that gets its meaning from its logical ties to other statements, and through them not only to sense-experience but also to normative governance..'(Gibbard,1990(p.102)).

#### 4. Normative Content

When a person makes a moral judgement he expresses a state of mind. The state of mind he expresses consists in his ruling out various combinations of (non-factual) norms with factual possibilities. A basic account of the content of moral judgements gives a structural characterization of factual/normative combinations which make up the contents that moral thinkers grasp and accept. The content of a moral

judgement is given by saying not how it presents the world to be or what state of affairs it asserts as obtaining, but rather by saying what kind of mental state it expresses. A factual or descriptive judgement might be thought to have as its content the set of ways the world could be to make it true. This can then be contrasted with Gibbard's account of the normative content of a moral judgement, on which the normative content of a moral judgement is given by the set of fully opinionated states one could be in and still accept the judgement. The normative content accepted by a moral thinker is a disjunction of all the factual plus normative opinions that might have consistently yielded it. The psychological reality behind this normative meaning lies in the logical relations which people attribute to the judgements they consider. What a person means by a moral judgement is the ruling out of every combination of fact and norm outside the set of combinations he would accept. No matter how complex the normative judgement is, it can be represented by such a set of 'factual/normative worlds'. Formal structures of such 'worlds' are thus meant to create the groundwork for a semantical representation of moral judgements. For example, the normative analogue of logical implication by modus ponens would go as follows: Content P entails content Q if and only if Q holds in every factual/normative world in which P holds. Normative content can be attributed to thinkers by making inferences according to such patterns a constraint on interpretation of their behaviour.

Norm-expressivism attributes two closely linked properties to the making of a moral judgement. Gibbard agrees that making a moral judgement is making a judgement one would regard as holding even if one did no longer believe it. He also agrees that moral judgements make claims beyond the first person. In fact, he regards them as making claims of rationality on all agents. Such a claim includes more than the mere acceptance of a system of norms; it also includes an element of what Gibbard calls 'conversational pressure'. This conversational pressure consists in demanding that others accept what one is saying, ie. that people share the state of mind that is being expressed. So in making a moral judgement a moral thinker expresses his acceptance of certain norms N applying to certain circumstances C, and demands that others do so as well.

##### 5. The Open Question Arguments

Gibbard's main argument for a distinctively non-cognitive and normative content for moral judgements is an application of G.E.Moore's so-called Open Question Argument (Moore,1903) in the context of a theory of representation for factual judgements. The first part of the argument claims that moral judgements are essentially contestable (chapter IV). Gibbard claims that any descriptivist or naturalistic construal of moral judgements will miss out the element of endorsement that is included in paradigmatic moral claims. Norm-expressivism captures this feature of



moral judgements, whereas descriptive or naturalistic theories are unable to do so. According to norm-expressivism, the idea is that it is the word 'rational' in its normative use which carries with it an automatically recommending force. Take the claim that P would be rational if it was chosen in a state of infeasible information. This claim fails as a descriptive account of what 'rational' means, and thus as an account of the content of a claim to rationality, because it would be intelligible to regard a choice made in the light of an infeasible state of information as irrational. An egoist might regard such a choice as irrational since he might think that in such a state he would become an altruist. A civil servant might think a choice in such a state irrational since he might think that in this state he would accept bribes. In Gibbard's words these are 'cases in which a person thinks himself an unreliable transformer of vivid realizations into rational desires, and so avoids dwelling on the facts that would lead him astray' (Gibbard,1990(p.21)). The claim is essentially that even if one might substantively disagree with any verdict which denies the validity of the descriptively given state of information, these denials are not nonsensical. Therefore it seems that the descriptive characterization given cannot capture the content of the normative judgement in question. Gibbard thinks that,generally, what is missing is a distinctively normative and non-cognitive content. What circumstances are the ideal ones for judgement is itself an irreducibly normative and contestable question about which judgements it makes sense to accord authority.

There are two reasons why this argument on its own has limited force. Firstly, it is explicitly endorsed in the form of essential contestability by the version of cognitivism which claims that moral thinking is essentially evaluational with regard to moral practice (Wiggins, 1987). Secondly, the open question argument in its basic form is not noticeably distinguishable from an argument which can be applied to any philosophical identification that is not analytically transparent, such as the identification of moral beliefs with sentiments (Sturgeon, 1985). This is an obvious consequence of the fact that identity-statements can be informative. It is clear, therefore, that if the open question argument is to have any force it must be supplemented in some way such that it either shows something distinctive about the question asked in the moral case, or exhibits some evidential relation between the possibility of asking the question and some features distinctive of non-cognitivism.

Gibbard supplements his argument for essential contestability by appealing to the teleological notion of Natural Representation. The aim of this line of thought is to distinguish the ways in which normative and factual judgements might represent the environment. He gives this characterization of natural representation: 'A system of Natural Representation for a feature S of the world is a system whose natural function it is to adjust some feature R of the world to correspond to S /in some arbitrary way/ .. R can then be called a natural representation of S' (Gibbard, 1990(p.109)). Natural representation is what Gibbard calls

correspondence by the Darwinian surrogate for design. The argument starts with the following question: Moral judgements are essentially coordinating (ie. motivational) judgements. So, when moral judgements coordinate, do they do so in virtue of representing naturally some subject matter or do they do it in some other way? In answer to this question Gibbard makes two claims. Firstly, moral judgements do not naturally represent observer-independent facts, since their verdicts necessarily depend on response-dependent features of the world, such as what judgements will coordinate. Secondly, they do not naturally represent observer-dependent facts as part of their normative content, even if they may represent such facts as part of their descriptive content. The conclusion is thus that moral and all normative judgements do not naturally represent their normative content. Briefly the claim is the following: For any descriptive judgement (P), there exists a naturally representational content for that judgement (P\*), such that both (notP,P\*) and (P,notP\*) form inconsistent sets. Now crucially, for any normative judgement P, even if that judgement naturally represents something Q, neither (notP,Q) nor (P,notQ) form inconsistent sets. Therefore normative judgements do not naturally represent their content.

To illustrate his case Gibbard considers the claim that we are adaptively fitted to make adaptively fitting judgements, and takes the claim that a judgement is adaptively fitting to be a candidate for what moral judgements naturally represent. The possibility to be considered is thus

that a moral judgement naturally represents that it itself is adaptively fitting and that this is its content. To show that this cannot be so, Gibbard contrasts this judgement with the descriptive judgement that AG is sitting in a chair. The claim is that this judgement, like all descriptive judgements, naturally represents its content. This is shown by reflecting that it is contradictory to assert that what this judgement naturally represents is the case while denying the judgement itself. This is true because the judgement naturally represents that AG is sitting in a chair and because to give the content of that judgement we can just repeat it. If one now considers a normative judgement, Gibbard claims that such a contradiction no longer occurs. That normative judgements do not naturally represent their content in this way can be seen by reflecting that it is possible to hold eg. that the judgement that I had better F is adaptively fitting (or whatever else it might be taken to naturally represent) while at the same time consistently judge that I had better not F. The sheer intelligibility of this combination of judgements appears to show that normative judgements do not naturally represent their content in the way in which some paradigmatically factual judgements do, and that they are therefore distinct from descriptive judgements insofar as these judgements naturally represent their content in this way. If a moral judgement (such as a thick moral judgement) has some descriptive content, then even if it naturally represents its descriptive content, it is still the case that it does not naturally represent its normative content (Gibbard, 1992).

Now, clearly Gibbard's teleological theory of natural representation could be mistaken. However, supposing that it is correct, what does this show about the correctness of non-cognitivism about the content of moral judgements? It appears that no conclusions can be drawn from this strengthened argument for essential contestability other than that if moral judgements are factual or properly assertoric judgements, then they are not factual or assertoric in this naturally representing way. Cognitivism has already been seen to be flexible enough to accommodate differences between moral and standardly factual judgements on the issue of internalism (Chapter II). Cognitivism appears capable of accommodating the lack of natural representation for moral judgements not only consistently with this difference (Wright, 1992), but perhaps also with direct reference to it (Wiggins, 1987; 1990/91).

But it is not clear that a cognitivist should accept Gibbard's argument. Someone who was not committed to the possibility of reducing moral judgements to non-moral judgements could accept Gibbard's test for descriptivity and use the principle that to give the content of a judgement one can just repeat that judgement to show that moral judgements are descriptive: Take any moral judgement P. The content of P can be given by repeating P. Furthermore, P naturally represents that P. The sets (P, notP) and (notP, P) are inconsistent. Therefore moral judgements are descriptive. Furthermore, someone who believes that moral judgements are conceptually reducible to descriptive judgements would be able to

use this test, given a commitment to the following principle: If a moral judgement P is conceptually reducible to a descriptive judgement Q, then the contents of P and Q can be given interchangeably by P and Q. And finally, someone who wishes to ontologically reduce moral properties to natural properties does not need to believe in any conceptual reduction (Sturgeon, 1985). In conclusion, the open question argument in isolation is not only of limited use to the non-cognitivist, it is also of limited use to anyone who believes that normative judgements are irreducibly non-descriptive.

#### 6. The Explanation Argument

For Gibbard the substance of any fact/norm or fact/value distinction is that normative judgements do not need to represent. This claim presupposes that his notion of representation, in giving content to the idea of factuality, is true and universal. The distinction entails that for every normative judgement that contains a natural representation, there exists a non-normative judgement which naturally represents the same thing. But for most normative judgements there is no such substantive element. Furthermore, Gibbard argues that a speculative evolutionary account potentially explains our normative capacities without supposing that there are normative facts to which moral judgements correspond. On this view it is an intelligible hypothesis that we might have had our normative capacities because they are useful in tracking normative facts.

But, according to Gibbard, the evidence is that norms attach to whatever facts evolution selects, and there is no reason to suppose that this should not vary. He therefore regards a moral science as an intelligible research programme but is sceptical whether any such research could come up with any sufficiently determinate properties to play the role of moral properties. In any case such properties would be explanatory without being justificatory in Gibbard's sense. They would therefore entail nothing about the falsity of non-cognitivism about normative content. Even in a world where there was a high degree of agreement on moral norms such that for Gibbard there was no clear matter of fact whether their moral terms meant something descriptive or something distinctly normative, it would still be the case that something normative and expressive would be necessary for thinkers to question their practices. Any language which includes resources to ask in a normative and action-guiding way whether something is rational is constrained to carry an expressive, normative and essentially contestable element. Qualifications on informative states or agreement cannot be expected to carry any restrictions on such normative content beyond nonsubstantial values such as consistency and basic needs. The kind of position Gibbard leaves room for here is a theory like externalist moral realism, read as a theory of descriptive judgements relating to moral practice (Chapter II). Gibbard claims that such theories miss the normative point of substantively moral judgements. What this brings out is the interesting, and putatively evidential, relationship between non-

cognitivism, internalism and essential contestability. This relationship might be seen to favour non-cognitivism if one cashes out both motivation internalism and essential contestability in terms of the necessity of a desire or another non-cognitive state (eg. norm-acceptance) for the making of a moral judgement. Two of the properties which distinguish moral judgements from standardly descriptive judgements are then just two consequences of the same phenomenon which non-cognitivism claims to have a simple explanation for and which cognitivism struggles to accommodate. However, the consistency of minimalism about moral judgements would ensure that there is no direct implication from this fact to a non-cognitivism about the content of moral judgements. Furthermore, the argument from explanation just cited has no logical implications for a theory of content, since the non-existence of moral facts is consistent with an error-theoretical anti-realist cognitivism.

### 7. Normative Content And Non-Endorsement

Non-cognitivism must be able to account for the realist grammar of moral judgements. A theory that aims to give the content of moral judgements in terms of subjective responses such as norm-acceptance must account for the following possibilities: a) cases where moral judgements are used or understood without the speaker intending to express approval of them, but where a judgement might nevertheless



gain expression, b) cases where moral judgements are evinced without the intention being to influence anyone and c) cases where a moral judgement is endorsed without any accompaniment of reasoning or reflection on norms. The notion of a normative content appears to capture these phenomena (Gibbard, 1990; Blackburn, 1992b). A less than ideally informed or opinionated normative thinker can be said to hold a disjunction of all the credal-normative states that have the verdict he endorses as their consequence. His grasp of normative contents can be explained with reference to an ideal normative thinker. An ideal normative thinker is in a completely opinionated credal-normative state such that there is a complete and determinate way he takes the world to be and there is a complete and coherent system of norms that he accepts. The state in which the ideal thinker finds himself is then a complete factual/normative world  $(W,N)$ . The normative content of a judgement can be represented in the following way. Take the complete set of factual beliefs  $W$ , and join them with a complete set of norms accepted  $N$ .  $(W,N)$  entails a normative judgement for any occasion. A particular moral judgement will hold as a matter of entailment in the factual/normative world  $(W,N)$ . For every normative predicate in the language being considered, Gibbard thinks we can define a parallel descriptive predicate, such as  $N$ -permitted,  $N$ -required and  $N$ -forbidden etc. One can then begin to talk about normative judgements in a non-normative and endorsement-free way. One can ask, for example, whether the normative judgement  $P$  holds in  $(W,N)$ , or whether someone

believes that P. To answer this question one replaces the normative predicates in P with their parallel descriptive predicates (n1,n2..etc) so as to yield a descriptive statement P(n). Now it will be the case that P holds in (W,N) if and only if P(n) holds in W. For example, "Whenever Jack does something wrong, he kicks himself" holds in (W,N) if and only if "Whenever Jack does something N-forbidden, he kicks himself" holds in W. The factual/normative worlds which give content to these moral judgements are ultimately the set of maximally opinionated states in which they could be held by speakers. It seems plain that this method of regarding moral judgements provides a structure which might deal with problems a)-c), and which can make sense of attributions of moral belief.

#### 8. Morality and Rationality

One problem which arises for norm-expressivism is the apparently paradoxical consequences of identifying moral considerations with rational considerations. For Gibbard, reasons concerning how to live are 'moral - perhaps in whole...'(Gibbard,1990 (p.4)). This means that to decide what one morally ought to do is really to make something like a 'flavourless recommendation on balance' which ends discussion and settles what to do (Op.cit. (p.50)). It now appears that it would be irrational to ask why one should do what one morally ought to do, since it appears irrational to ask what reason one has to do what one rationally ought to do. But it seems possible a) to find something rational, yet

morally inappropriate (eg. egoism), and b) to find something morally required but not rationally required (eg. altruism). Gibbard has a formally consistent response to this objection when it is applied to morality in his narrow sense (ie. norms for moral feelings). His strategy is to distinguish between a narrowly moral judgement, such as 'It is rational to feel guilt', and a narrowly non-moral judgement with which it is in practical conflict, such as 'It is rational not to want to feel guilt'. In this way someone could think that it is always unreasonable to want to feel guilty, or to be an individual who feels guilt, while at the same time hold that guilt is rational. The point would appear to be that it might be rational not to want to feel what it is rational to feel in a certain situation (fear in the face of danger might be an example). However, Gibbard admits that this does not avoid the problem, for one could straightforwardly deny that it is rational to feel what it has been thought one morally ought to feel. In that case one would be rejecting morality outright in his narrow sense. But this is consistent with the acceptance of a large number of moral beliefs in the widest sense, about what kind of life it is rational to live. For these kinds of beliefs there cannot be any reflective intention to endorse what one regards as immoral and thus irrational. Gibbard claims that on the widest construal of morality, the question of whether what is moral is rational is a trivial one. To be moral in the widest sense just is to be rational (Op.cit. (pp.52-3)). He does not say whether it could be rational for someone not to want to live the way it is rational for him to live. Could it perhaps be rational for him to be moral, but also rational for

him not to want to be moral, since morality might only be rational if one cares about others, and it might be rational not to want to be someone who cares about others?

In Chapter III I rejected the identification of moral judgements with judgements of rationality. Is this rejection consistent with Gibbard's claims? It would be if Gibbard's notion of rationality in the widest sense presupposed the acceptability of the social point of view. In that case the two notions of rationality would be compatible, as the notion I have applied explicitly allowed room to question the social point of view. If it does not, then there arises a clear conflict regarding the aspirations of moral judgement. Does Gibbard's account threaten the claim of Chapter III?

My claim in Chapter III was that it could be rational for the egoist not to want to do what he morally ought to do. On the model which I have chosen, this is not a problem: If it can be rational to reject a verdict from a certain point of view, then that point of view cannot be the rational point of view. In my opinion the example of the egoist is evidence that the moral point of view presupposes a certain social commitment which need not be regarded as rationally required. There is evidence that this view is consistent with Gibbard's account, but the issue emerges in more than one way in his discussion, and it is not clear how the different strands of thought are related. Firstly, he accepts that one can call

someone immoral without calling him irrational, crazy or foolish. The notion of rationality he has in mind is 'a more full-blown rationality that goes beyond shrewdness...' and which includes 'good judgement about what it really makes sense to work for in life, all things considered...' (Op.cit. (p.299)). To judge that it really makes sense to do a thing is 'not to rule out doing it oneself in exactly the same circumstances...' (Op.cit. (p.299)). The question here is whether moral norms warrant rational endorsement, and the notion employed by Gibbard might be called Substantial Rationality. Secondly, when he argues normatively about the justifiability of moral norms, he talks about rationality from the standpoint of 'full, impartial engagement...' (Op.cit (p.294)), of 'a psychic engineer charged with designing our norms for an advantage we recognize together...' (Op.cit. (p.300)), and what we could work towards jointly in normative discussion. This approach meshes well with his account of the function of moral judgements, which assigns to morality the task of discovering rational norms for cooperation. The social standpoint seems presupposed, without any question of warrant. Gibbard recognizes that this is not the only possible standpoint of 'pragmatic' assessment, but argues that the case of a committed egoist does not affect what is rational for 'us', since for 'us' generous motives count essentially in normative thinking, at least to some degree. Here it seems that Gibbard's notion of rationality presupposes a social point of view and that it is thus not in any immediate conflict with the claim of Chapter III.

With regard to Gibbard's notion of substantial rationality, it is not clear whether norms which entail social commitment are norms of rationality, rather than rational norms from the standpoint of social commitment. What exactly is the sense in which the calculating egoist is not fully rational? It has been argued that the way to defend a notion of substantive rationality is to derive it from a true substantive theory of rationality (Sturgeon, 1985). Gibbard is a non-cognitivist about rationality, and thus does not believe that there can be such a theory. In that case, if the identification of morality with rationality depends on a substantive theory of rationality, then this identification expresses norms which Gibbard accepts, norms which are essentially contestable. In other words, there is no fact of the matter whether moral norms attain to the status of defensible norms of rationality, and of whether egoism is irrational.

Gibbard thinks that 'morality' and 'rationality' are vague concepts, some strands of which may be incompatible with each other (Op.cit. (pp.293-4)). His claim is that morality conceived of as practical rationality is one such strand, one which explains the idea that moral reasons are reasons counting above all others. The question is then whether construing moral norms as norms of rationality places too much strain on the concept of morality as it is generally understood. I maintain that examples such as that of the committed egoist are evidence that the concepts of rationality and morality have crucially distinct uses and purposes, and that the

unclearly of Gibbard's own usage of these concepts is a manifestation of this fact. A straightforward identification of moral norms in the widest sense with norms of rationality is therefore misleading.

### 9. Norm-Expressivism and Minimalism

Gibbard's main argument against cognitivism applies the claim that moral judgements are essentially contestable to show that moral judgements do not involve any substantial notion of representation. This claim does not show that moral judgements are not assertoric (Chapter IV). Norm-expressivism is therefore undermotivated as an alternative non-error-theoretic anti-realism. It has been argued that the notion of representation is the wrong notion to take as the central one in an account of moral truth, and that the relevant notion is that of convergence in opinion as a result of normative and essentially contestable discussion (Wiggins, 1987; 1990/91), or one of what we have or have not got reason to do (Nagel, 1986). If this view is tenable, then it is possible that moral judgements are nondescriptively assertoric cognitive judgements which lack any substantive representational features. It has also been argued that by helping oneself to a notion of the moral point of view there will be candidates for minimal truth in the sense of reflective convergence (eg. 'Torture is wrong, all other things being equal', 'Genocide for fun is to be avoided' etc.). Gibbard would agree that such convergence is to be expected, only he thinks this is an

empirical fact explicable with reference to needs of cooperation and not to the putative detection of truths, even in the minimal sense. Truth belongs in the domain of facts and there are no normative facts.

On the other hand, could not Gibbard take on board the claim that moral judgements are non-representational assertoric judgements with a narrow truth-predicate (ie. minimally cognitive) and still hold to his norm-expressivism? Not obviously. This can be seen in the following way. Wright claimed that if the syntactic and disciplinary features of a discourse qualify that discourse for assertoricity, then that discourse has minimally cognitive content (Wright, 1992). However, Gibbard's theory of content and his semantics for moral judgements is manifestly expressivist. Therefore, if Gibbard accepts that moral judgements satisfy the minimal criteria of assertoricity as well, then he is committed to hold that a theory of the content of moral judgements is determined by features beyond the syntactic and disciplinary properties of moral discourse (essential contestability, internalism, lack of representational function etc.). This claim is in manifest disagreement with Wright's minimalism about the content of moral judgements.

## 10. Conclusion

The route to Gibbard's position now seems clear. Since moral judgements lack any naturally representational features it seems impossible to give the content of moral judgements in terms of ways in



which the world could be. A natural further step is then to give the content of these judgements in terms of the mental states which they express, and in terms of the putative function of moral judgements. It is the function of moral judgements to coordinate, whereas it is the function of descriptive judgements to represent the environment. Moral judgements thus communicate and recommend subjective states of norm-acceptance and not claims about how the world might be. Since moral judgements are not merely psychological reports, it is natural to give an explanation in terms of expression of subjective states by means of indicative assertions. These indicative assertions are candidates for assertoricity and minimalism in Wright's sense. However, Gibbard's story is incompatible with the claim that these superficial features of moral judgements determine their content. The issue that remains unresolved is therefore the following: Is non-cognitivism an adequate theory of what moral thinkers say when they make moral judgements, or is it rather an adequate theory of what they do with them, irrespective of what they say? In other words, is non-cognitivism a true theory of function but a false theory of content? In spite of the fact that minimalism undermines several of the classical motivations for non-cognitivism, it seems to me that the onus must be on the cognitivist at this point. What Gibbard has and the cognitivists I have considered do not have is a theory of the content for moral judgements which has been integrated with substantial theories of function and justification. It is in the light of this latter fact that Gibbard's theory can be said to gain explanatory support from wider

considerations in a way which none of the other theories I have discussed can. However, it is also clear that there is no inferential link from the considerations put forward by Gibbard in favour of his theory to a thesis of norm-expressivism or non-cognitivism about the content of moral judgements.

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