OBJECTIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MORAL EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The central problem addressed in this thesis has two parts. First, how can an educator respect the developing autonomy of a student's rational capacities while nurturing the development of particular moral sensibilities and a particular moral perspective? Second, if a moral educator challenges a group of students to consider an alternative moral position, how can she or he be justified in presenting the new perspective as superior to the old one?

My argument, in summary, is that an ideal of strong objectivity, as it is conceived by Sandra Harding in the context of feminist standpoint theory, works as a set of standards against which to evaluate the adequacy of one's moral perspective, and it offers a valuable means for comparing this perspective to others. Strong objectivity is an ideal which employs a set of standards including respect, reflexivity, and critical evaluation of social situations to challenge inquirers to maximise their objectivity. They do this through recognising and testing not only the content of their knowledge claims but also the purpose these claims play in the development of research programs. A commitment to strong objectivity entails attempting to understand the partiality of one's own perspective and recognising how that partiality distorts one's perception.

The process of learning from others' perspectives is central to revising and enriching one's own perspective, and this revision and enrichment is an ongoing responsibility for any teacher. Through the application of strong objectivity to moral theory building, a moral educator can be justified in believing

that her or his own moral perspective is the most adequate one available. If a

moral educator understands Harding's conception of strong objectivity, and

embraces it as an ideal, the result will be a more justly equitable learning

environment and a more complete understanding of the moral perspective which

is being developed within the classroom. These are fundamental to the

legitimacy of the work of a moral educator.

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The Problem

In the year or so after I first began this degree, I started to teach foundations of education courses to students in the teacher certification program here at UBC. One course in particular that I taught each fall was a general introduction course which requires covering a variety of social issues such as multiculturalism and education, gender issues in schools, First Nations education, and a variety of similar topics.

At first, keen zealot that I was, I was baffled by the degree of resistance with which I met. I realised that I had been approaching the teaching as if all I had to do was offer up the content and they would eagerly agree and "be converted" to non-racist, feminist elaborations of education theory. I was also baffled by their mistrust of much of what I was offering. I needed to find a way to understand where the students were coming from—the agenda behind the counter arguments they offered or (worse yet) the silent resistance.

At the same time, I noticed another thing. There were a number of more conservative views in some classes which were not getting the air time I felt they deserved. For example, in one class there was a small, very quiet group of women who did not want to identify themselves as feminists and did not accept many of the things I was presenting, but were apparently afraid to speak up

because of a number of vocal feminists in the room. It seemed to me the ultimate irony that I, a feminist, was running a class in which the most timid women were silenced.

It seemed that there were two different sorts of vocal students: the conservative ones who were generally privileged in a number of ways by virtue of their race or gender or some similar signifier, and the ones who came from positions we tend to refer to as marginal—women, women or men of colour, for example—but who had the combination of background reading and power of personality required to silence those who disagreed with them. (I remember one particular class in which two enthusiastically vocal students who disagreed on nearly everything would have silenced *everyone* else had they been successful.)

I had three overriding concerns. First, I did not want to be a teacher who was just as much of an intellectual bully as some of those students. Second, I was concerned that if I did not set up an atmosphere in which the more timid ones or the ones with the less popular views had an opportunity to be involved, they would not engage with the material in any meaningful way beyond what they needed to do to get the grade. Finally, I needed a way to be sure enough of the superiority of my perspective to justify attempting to "convert" the students. I realised that the work I was doing, under the surface of the "content readings," was moral education of a very profound sort. I was not only trying to change students' minds about the way our society organises and grants privilege based

on criteria which are far from just. I was also trying to change their ideas about what constitutes legitimate, respectful discourse in an academic setting.

When I came to write this thesis, I realised that the concerns I had in my university level teaching are common to teachers at every level of schooling. It is hard for me to imagine any sort of teaching which does not involve a moral component, but "moral education" implies more than simply educating in a morally appropriate manner and teaching for morally appropriate objectives. Moral education involves nurturing the development of one's students into morally mature individuals who can participate as competent adults in the life of their moral community. Many teachers in public schools believe that they should not attempt to educate their students in morality. They have the idea that moral education must imply some kind of coercive or indoctrinative initiation into particular religious beliefs, or that it involves the teacher "imposing" her or his personal (perhaps eccentric) beliefs onto young and vulnerable minds. I have heard student teachers argue that they do not want to "teach values" because they want their students to "stay open-minded." They will agree that much of what we call moral education is conveyed by example and through modelling of morally appropriate attitudes and behaviour by the teacher. But they continue to resist my arguments that everything from our teaching style, to our methods of evaluating, to our behaviour towards individual students in and out of the class demonstrates some aspect of the set of values to which we are committed.

I argue that moral education is part of every teaching interaction. Sometimes it is explicit, as when a teacher challenges the class to consider an alternative position, for example, on an issue concerning their school or community. Sometimes it is implicit, as for example in refusing to accept disrespectful comments in a class discussion or demonstrating an openness to students' opinions. In either case, the educator is offering to his or her students the example of a moral view and the challenge to accept or reject it (obviously with the hope that students will choose to accept it). Every teacher, then, is a moral educator. I will argue that to be a responsible moral educator requires two fundamental commitments.

First, a responsible educator must be committed to nurturing the student's developing moral sensibilities. This entails a number of elements. For teachers of children, it means providing an education that goes beyond training in moral habits. It might be that when a child is not yet mature enough to choose moral habits a parent or teacher will train the child, but this initial training should be thought of as the first step only; while it will undoubtedly have an effect on the child's developing moral sensibilities, it does not constitute moral education. The development of moral sensibilities also means preparing students to take their part as competent adults in the life of their moral communities. For parents and teachers of young children, this means initiating the student into the constellation of moral knowledge, attitudes, and practices accepted by the adult community of which they will be a part. For teachers of adult students it means

setting an example and encouraging students to accept the challenge to be vigilant in ensuring that the moral positions they adopt are the most appropriate ones available. Finally, legitimate moral education cannot be indoctrinative. If when I reached maturity I found that I was not rationally capable of rejecting my moral perspective, I would have grounds to criticise the legitimacy of my moral education.

Second, where a moral educator expects students to adopt her or his perspective, it is incumbent upon that educator to ensure that the perspective offered as an example to the student is the most responsible one available. Where the student is being challenged to consider an alternative perspective, the teacher must have reason to believe the new position is superior to the student's old one. Moral educators, indeed all competent adult participants in moral discourse, need a means for judging the adequacy of their own moral perspective and of comparing it to those of others.

The central problem I am addressing, therefore, has two parts. First, how can an educator respect the developing autonomy of the student's rational capacities while nurturing the development of particular moral sensibilities and a particular moral perspective? Second, if a moral educator challenges a group of students to consider an alternative moral position, how can she or he be justified in presenting the new perspective as superior to the old one?

My Project

My argument, in summary, is that an ideal of strong objectivity, as it is conceived by Sandra Harding in the context of feminist standpoint theory, works as a set of standards against which to evaluate the adequacy of one's moral perspective, and it offers a valuable means for comparing this perspective to others. I argue that the most useful thing that strong objectivity has to offer moral inquiry is an understanding of the importance of acknowledging the partiality of one's own perspective and a means for seeing how a given perspective influences one's perception. Because the process of learning from others' perspectives is central to revising and enriching one's own perspective, and because this revision and enrichment is an ongoing process, it is the responsibility of a moral educator continually to undertake the revision I am describing. In working towards an ideal of strong objectivity in moral theory building, a moral educator can be justified in believing that her or his own moral perspective is the most adequate one available. This belief is fundamental to the legitimacy of the work of a moral educator.

Objectivity

In the arguments that follow, I turn first to an examination of some methods used to compare and evaluate epistemological paradigms in the natural and social sciences. A central element of the thesis I am developing is the recognition that the material position of a researcher has a profound influence

upon the development of knowledge, both in the moral and in the scientific realms. The power of the researcher relative to other researchers in the field and to the broader society will have an impact both on the kinds of things which are discussed and researched and on the researcher's ability to disseminate results. Since gender is one among a number of fundamental categories within which meaning and value are socially assigned (together with race, class, and others) our understanding of gender will affect the development of research and will have an impact upon our understanding of theory development. The feminist standpoint theories in particular offer important insights into the relationship between the material position of a researcher and the development of knowledge. But most valuable for the purposes of the argument I will develop is Sandra Harding's (1991) conception of strong objectivity which arises from her articulation of standpoint theory.

The standard version of objectivity, that offered by empiricists, requires an investigator to overcome his or her social position to achieve a value-neutral vantage point—the so-called "archimedean point." In her articulation of standpoint theory, Harding suggests that a more complete objectivity would not call for the impossible separation of the investigator from the program of research. On the contrary, she argues for the acknowledgement that all human knowledge is socially situated. Like Kuhn, Harding argues that although her paradigm is socially situated, the recognition of this situatedness gives the knower the right to claim that her or his own theory is superior—is, if not closer

to "The Truth," at least less partial. Harding's project is not to free herself from her material position but to understand it. She calls her method for interrogating the social context of theory "strong objectivity" and distinguishes it from those "weak" forms of objectivity which have either attempted to overcome or have simply ignored their contexts.

Although Harding does not call it an ideal, as she uses the concept it works like one. It incorporates both some means for achieving the best possible results and a set of standards against which to measure the partiality of one's perspective. A commitment to strong objectivity entails critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most complete or the least distorted knowledge claims. The feminist standpoint theories, as I elaborate in Chapter One, hinge on an understanding that the material position of a researcher has a profound impact on the individual's ability to know certain types of things. In particular, standpoint theorists argue that the position of the oppressed is epistemically privileged. An oppressed person understands better and understands more about the relations of oppression. A more complete understanding of the social context in which knowledge is developed leads to a more complete and more accurate account of the development of research programs.

My position is not entirely in accord with the standpoint theorists'. While I would agree that a person's social context does inform knowledge, I am not convinced (and in Chapter One I will detail my position) that a position of

oppression automatically grants one epistemic privilege. Nevertheless, I find Harding's conception of strong objectivity compelling. I will argue that while it is neither practical nor particularly useful to suggest that people give up their privilege, they can learn to adopt some aspects of alternative perspectives and thereby more closely approximate the ideal of strong objectivity for which Harding is arguing.

Moral Epistemology

Having argued that some version of strong objectivity is important for the development of scientific knowledge, I will go on to argue that moral knowledge can be developed and justified in much the same way as can scientific knowledge. My argument at this stage follows those of pragmatists such as John Dewey, Hillary Putnam, and Jeffrey Stout. Just as Harding argues that social sciences are neither more nor less objective than natural sciences, Stout argues that moral theory is no less subject to rational evaluation than is scientific theory. While it is clear, he says, that moral judgements are not tested exactly as scientific hypotheses are; it is much less clear that the notion of testing fails to apply to moral judgements (Stout, 1988, p, 36).

Stout's argument is that we should view scientific and moral reasoning, despite their differences, as two aspects of a single rational and objective process in which we criticise and revise our propositional attitudes. As young children, individuals learn to take part in moral discourse within the particular

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group into which they are initiated. It is not possible for individuals to make moral judgements apart from the moral perspective within which they operate; i.e., the beliefs, habits of description, and patterns of reasoning that belong to a particular cultural heritage. This poses a problem when it comes to moral disagreement between people from different groups, as will often occur in a pluralistic society such as ours in Canada. While it may be difficult to adjudicate among differing moral judgements, such difficulty should not be taken as a reason to abandon the attempt.

Following my elaboration of the pragmatist arguments in favour of treating moral and scientific knowledge in similar manners, I go on in Chapter Three to explore the problem of moral disagreement and the solutions offered by three theorists: Alasdair MacIntyre, Sabina Lovibond, and Jürgen Habermas. Through his elaboration of communitarianism, MacIntyre reminds us of the importance of understanding the moral context into which the individual is socialised. This context informs the decisions the individual will make although it is itself unchosen. An understanding of this context will be crucial to using strong objectivity in the development of moral knowledge. I explain what practical results follow from a commitment to strong objectivity in Chapters Four and Five. Lovibond's version of moral realism draws attention to the coercive potential of intellectual authority and to the various means available for resolving moral disputes, both of which I return to in these later chapters. Habermas's theory of communicative action, and his development of discourse ethics are

also elaborated at this point, and will be important in my arguments concerning the practical work which follows from a commitment to strong objectivity in moral discourse.

Strong Objectivity and Moral Paradigms

The pragmatists help us to see that the adequacy of a moral paradigm can be judged in much the same way as can that of a scientific paradigm. In strong objectivity, Harding has offered us a powerful means of interrogating the social context of a scientific paradigm, and a standard of objectivity towards which we can aim. The task that remains is to determine the practical applications which follow from a commitment to strong objectivity in the development of moral discourse. I attempt to do so in my final two chapters, devoting each chapter to a different aspect of the two-part problem that teachers face in the moral dimension of their work. In Chapter Four I discuss the problem of how a moral educator can be sure that her or his own moral perspective is the most adequate one available, and how an adult participant in moral discourse can respond to moral disagreement. I argue that strong objectivity offers us an ideal according to which we can more responsibly understand and respond to alternative moral positions. A commitment to strong objectivity entails attempting to gain, I argue, both distance from our position and a reflexivity that is important for understanding the agendas behind our decisions. At the same time this commitment challenges those in more powerful positions to attend to less

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powerful or less fashionable views—those which are sometimes described as coming "from the margins" of a particular discourse. In Chapter Five I go on to explore the problems which may arise in moral education, and in particular the tension between a teacher's unavoidable power over students and the desire to nurture the development of the student's rational autonomy. I suggest ways in which adopting an ideal of strong objectivity can help us to respond responsibly to this tension.

CHAPTER ONE:

Feminist Epistemology and the Development of Programs of Research

Epistemologies

As I outlined in the Introduction, my argument aims to employ Sandra

Harding's ideal of strong objectivity both as a means for evaluating the adequacy

of a moral perspective and as a set of standards towards which moral educators

can aim in the responsible development of their own and their students' moral

views. To do this, I begin by discussing the theoretical context in which strong

objectivity was developed.

In this chapter, I discuss a number of different articulations of feminist

epistemologies. I want to make it clear that I am not using the term epistemology

to mean a "way of knowing." I do not argue that women or any other group

"know" things in a different way from others. I do believe that members of

marginalised groups, for example women, aboriginal people, and others, are in

general likely to know different things than members of the dominant group, and

I would argue that they may differently privilege those things they do know.

Because of these factors their knowledge may take different forms. It may be

organised differently, and may not even be recognised as "knowledge" by the

more powerful group; for example, it may be called be called "intuition" or

"instinct." A different form of knowledge, however, is not the same thing as a

different way of knowing. To have a different epistemology, I argue, is to treat

the nature of knowledge in a different way. For feminists this must at least mean recognising the political and social implications of theory building, and conversely the ways in which theory development depends on the social and political context from which it arises. Feminist philosophers of knowledge must be prepared to investigate both the impact of the researcher on the developing discipline, and the resulting influence of that knowledge development upon the researcher.

There is a variety of feminist descriptions of knowledge and prescriptions for its development. Each of them, to at least some extent, acknowledges the relationship between power and knowledge development. Three main groups of feminist theories of knowledge are feminist empiricism, feminist postmodernism, and feminist standpoint theories. Of the three, the standpoint theories have the most important insights into the ways that power relationships affect the development of knowledge and our understanding of it. The standpoint theories focus on the importance of the material position of the knower, and challenge us to acknowledge the effect of that position on our understanding. Standpoint theories go on, however, to claim that the position of the oppressed is epistemically superior to the position of the oppressor, and it is here that the theories fail to convince me, as I will argue presently. Even without granting the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, however, I will argue that the standpoint theories' articulation of the context of knowledge production and the perspective of the knower provides an important critical insight. In addition, philosopher

Sandra Harding's (1991) conception of "strong objectivity" provides a means for examining the theoretical and the material context of a knowledge claim.

In this chapter I will offer three arguments. First, having summarised the range of current feminist epistemologies, focusing specifically on feminist standpoint theories, I will show that while the standpoint theories offer important insights into the way knowledge is developed and justified, it is nevertheless fundamentally misguided to believe that the standpoint of women, or of any oppressed group, gives access to a position of epistemic privilege. Second, I will show how a commitment to Harding's ideal of "strong objectivity" calls for particular kinds of evaluations of an existing scientific theory or research program and why it is responsible to undertake such evaluations. Third, I will argue that because a commitment to strong objectivity requires a researcher to include more previously marginalised perspectives into mainstream academic research, it is required both for epistemological reasons and for the morally legitimate development of research programs.

Feminist Epistemology

One way to make sense of the range of feminist criticisms of traditional epistemology is to imagine a continuum incorporating different conceptions of knowledge, with traditional empiricism at one end and radical postmodernism at the other. The traditional empiricist account of knowledge argues that the world is accessible to us primarily through our senses. Scientists use their senses to

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record observations which in turn will confirm or disprove their hypotheses. To be sure that their observations are as objective as possible, scientists must make every attempt to separate their observations from the theoretical presuppositions giving rise to them. The purpose is to free observations from bias which might lead the scientists to "read into" their otherwise pure observations and impose conclusions which do not follow directly from the data. The more scientists can leave their presuppositions behind, the more objective their results will be. Feminist empiricism shares with traditional empiricism the goal of maximising objectivity by removing bias, but feminist empiricists do not attempt to lessen the influence of their feminist commitments upon their research.[1] On the contrary, feminist empiricists assert that feminists (whether male or female) are more likely to conduct research which is free from androcentric bias because their political sensibilities predispose them to check for and try to control these biases. The traditional empiricist reliance on intersubjectivity to ensure maximum objectivity is acknowledged by feminist empiricists, but it is argued that those who are in a position to conduct research are likely to share a perspective and will thus be blind to the bias which they share. If the whole group shares a particular bias, intersubjectivity within the group will not uncover it. Feminist empiricism further challenges the enforced separation of research from the values and politics of its practitioners. Some versions argue that the politics of, for example, movements for emancipatory

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[1] See, for example, the work of Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1990).

social change, can increase the objectivity of the research being conducted by pointing out contradictions inherent in the traditional discourse.

At the other end of the continuum lies feminist postmodernism which is largely concerned with pointing out claims to and assumptions about neutrality. The postmodern conception of knowledge assumes that all knowers are inextricably tied to their social positions; that their knowledge cannot be separated from the wider network of theories and assumptions which both presuppose it and underpin it. Because research can progress only within a given paradigm, and because postmodernists reject the existence of an archimedean perspective from which purely objective facts are available, scientists have no way of objectively verifying any aspect of knowledge. As with feminist empiricism, it is the political nature of feminist theory which stops it short of the far end of the continuum. A feminist must, if nothing else, believe that the oppression of women is fundamentally wrong in any context and within any paradigm, thus the radical relativism implied by the most extreme articulations of postmodern discourse is unacceptable from the perspective of a feminist.

Nevertheless, postmodern feminism offers important criticisms of traditional research. A postmodern feminist recognises that other theories of feminist epistemology are products of the modernist view of the world and as such presuppose dualisms which postmoderns reject. Hekman (1990), for example, argues that traditional feminist paradigms are flawed in that their roots remain in the Enlightenment worldview. As such, they maintain, and in fact

strengthen and contribute to the dualities inherent in this view. These dualities are rationalist and masculinist in nature; inevitably, she argues, when such dualities are invoked women are associated with the less desirable element. Rather than making binary distinctions, postmodern feminists argue that it is more reasonable to see the world in terms of multiplicities of reality, any one of which could be situated along a limitless number of continua. All knowledge is mediated by one's particular set of social relations, including relations of class, gender and race, among others. Thus, from the postmodern perspective, there is no "hard line" between the rational and the non-rational, subject and object, culture and nature, masculine and feminine. Although it is not logically necessary, in practice the dichotomies which are formed lead to hierarchies. Postmodern feminists argue that all knowledge is contextual and historical, but they stop short of the radical relativism of some postmodern accounts.

Postmodern feminism draws attention to some important problems inherent in the traditional feminist theories; specifically, those elements which depend on structures developed from within the modernist status quo. Drawing upon this as a political strategy, postmodern feminists refuse to be pulled into traditional types of discourse, preferring to criticise not simply the manner in which these discourses are conducted but the norms of the programs themselves.

Feminist Standpoint Theories

Near the middle of the continuum are located the feminist standpoint

theories. Standpoint theories maintain that not just our opinions but all our

knowledge is mediated by the social context in which it arises. But unlike the

postmoderns, standpoint theorists argue that a crucial element of knowledge

development is understood through relations of power; specifically, through the

gendered relations which are unavoidable in a patriarchal society. While

rejecting the idea of an unbiased archimedean perspective, standpoint theorists

argue that certain social positions lend themselves to more complete versions of

objective knowledge. The theories have their historical origin in Hegel's insight

into the relationship between the master and the slave, and the development of

Hegel's perceptions into the "proletarian standpoint" by Marx, Engels, and later

Lukàcs. The assertion is that human activity, or "material life," not only

structures but sets limits on human understanding. Feminist standpoint theorists

claim that because of their position in a gender-stratified society, women have

access to a more complete knowledge. [2] For example, Nancy Hartsock writes

that if human activity is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two

different groups (such as men and women), "one can expect that the vision of

each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the

vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (Hartsock, 1983,

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[2] Harding identifies three feminist standpoint theorists who have made
particularly important contributions: Dorothy Smith (1987), Nancy Hartsock
(1983), and Hilary Rose (1983). Other feminists who have elaborated versions
of standpoint theories include Jane Flax (1983), Alison Jaggar (1983), Patricia
Hill Collins (1986), and Sandra Harding herself (1986, 1991).

p. 285). The problem with this line of argument, it seems to me, is that while it is reasonable to assert that the material position of the researcher has a profound effect on both the methods and the goals of inquiry, it may not follow that a particular position provides a "truer" or "less partial" perspective.

As there is a variety of versions of feminist standpoint theories, the grounds for justifying them are also various. While all trace their historical roots through Marx to the Hegelian insight I described above, and all take particular account of the more complete knowledge they say is generated from the position of the oppressed, the justificatory strategies employed can be seen to fall roughly along the same continuum I have suggested can be used to group feminist epistemologies in general. I have grouped these justificatory strategies into three types: first, those that, like feminist empiricism, claim that women's voices or experiences have been erroneously neglected and excluded; second, arguments that stem more or less directly from Hegel's conception of the master-slave relationship; and third, those that share with the postmoderns a concern to reject modernist ideological dualisms and argue that women are better equipped to mediate such dualisms. I will take some time here to elaborate and respond to the most influential of these arguments.

Theorists offer two very different sorts of arguments requiring the inclusion of women's lives and experiences as both the agents and the objects of inquiry. The first set argues that women and men do and historically have lived different sorts of lives, and it has been the case in traditional research that

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women's different lives have been problematically devalued and neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims. Human lives are part of the empirical world that scientists study, but human lives are not homogeneous in any gender-stratified society. It is thus from the fresh perspective of women's lives that we can study the half of the world which has up to now been neglected. Taken just this far, it is not an argument that women's perspective offers any sort of epistemic privilege, merely that adherence to a principle of justice requires that a group not be arbitrarily excluded. But theorists such as Nancy Chodorow (1978)[3] and Jane Flax (1983) suggest that there are important psychological differences in the make up of masculine and feminine personalities, and go on to argue that women are better equipped to be objective about the world than are men because of the "less defensive structure of femininity than of masculinity" (Harding, 1991, p. 121). As Harding summarises this point:

> Different infantile experiences, reinforced throughout life, lead
>
> men to perceive their masculinity as a fragile phenomenon that
>
> they must continually struggle to defend and maintain. In
>
> contrast, women perceive femininity as a much sturdier part of
>
> the "self." Stereotypically, "real women" appear as if provided by

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[3] Chodorow does not extend her theory to an elaboration of the feminist standpoint, but her arguments are the basis for others (such as Flax) who have.

nature; "real men" appear as a fragile social construct. (Harding, 1991, p. 121)

Following these theorists, Sandra Harding (1991) side-steps the essentialist argument by pointing out that since not all women are feminists it is clearly not one's experience as a woman which grants a feminist standpoint. Men too, she argues, can share in "women's" perspectives. Regardless of the gender of the researcher, feminist research must begin with the lives and experiences of women.

My reaction to this line of argument is to agree that it is wrong for women to have been excluded from research, and to agree that research about women should start from women's lives. It is not, however, the fact that they are women which is important; it is the fact that they have been excluded. *Some* research, and of course research that is *about women*, should start from women's lives and experience; indeed, *some* research should start from the lives of any neglected group. But it would not be any more legitimate to neglect men's lives. Harding does, however, raise an interesting point regarding one's ability to enter into another's perspective. I will argue below that not only can this be done, but it is the responsibility, particularly of those in positions of power, to make every effort to do so.

A second but closely related argument, also resulting from women's exclusion as academics, is that as valuable strangers to the social order, women

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bring, in Harding's words, just the right combination of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference, that are central to maximising objectivity (Harding, 1991, p. 124). Because women have been excluded from science, they are these strangers; therefore, as Patricia Hill Collins (1986) argues, feminism teaches both women and men how to see the social order from the perspective of an outsider.

It seems clear to me that the stranger to a social order will see different things than will an "insider." In some senses, it may be that a stranger will see things better; for example, the newcomer to a group may notice contradictions or needless complications in some of the group's practices which are taken for granted by those "on the inside." I will argue that a given researcher can take the perspective of a stranger, or at least some aspects of that perspective, without having to *be* that stranger. This is easier for someone from the excluded group, for reasons that I will explore later, but it is not impossible for someone from within.

The next group of arguments in favour of a feminist standpoint follow directly from the Hegelian understanding of the epistemic superiority of the oppressed. Harding and other theorists argue that women's oppression gives them fewer interests in ignorance. As members of a dominated group, they have less to lose by distancing themselves from the social order; thus, their perspective can more easily generate fresh and critical analysis. In terms of a political consciousness, this may be true. We do not typically expect radical

social change to originate from those with the most to lose by it. But there are many reasons why a member of the oppressed group might not want to work against the system. While I might agree that the oppressor has every reason to maintain the existing social order, oppressed people potentially have a great deal to lose in resisting the social order unless it seems certain that change is immanent.

In a related argument Harding says that in as much as history is told by the "winners," women's history and perspectives have been from the side of the "losers" and thus have not been told. Harding argues that trying to construct the story from the perspective of the lives of those who resist oppression generates less partial and distorted accounts of nature and social relations (Harding, 1991, p. 126). I would agree with Harding, for the kinds of reasons I offered above, that without the perspective of the less powerful we only have a partial history. But to go on to suggest that one side has access to a position of epistemic superiority is to make an entirely different claim. It is not at all clear that the stories of the "losers" are any less partial. Harding argues that feminist politics is not just a tolerable companion of feminist research but a necessary condition for generating less partial and less distorted descriptions and explanations. Harding argues:

In a socially stratified society the objectivity of the results of research is increased by political activism by and on behalf of

oppressed, exploited, and dominated groups. Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is constructed and maintained. (Harding, 1991, p. 127)

While I agree with these observations, nothing in the argument leads me to conclude that the exploited groups can necessarily better see the nature of their exploitation.

The final group of justifications for a feminist standpoint arise from the different nature of daily work in which women and men are engaged and is linked to postmodern feminist arguments which endeavour to mediate or eliminate ideological dualisms. Theorists such as Dorothy Smith (1987) argue that women's perspective, unlike that of men engaged in "ruling activities," is from everyday life. The perspective from women's everyday activity, like that of a man who is engaged in manual work every day, is epistemologically preferable to the perspective available only from the "ruling" activities of men in the dominant groups. Smith argues that women have been assigned the kinds of work that men in the ruling groups do not want to do, and as men are relieved of the need to maintain their own bodies and the local places where they exist, they come to see as real only that which corresponds to their abstract mental world. This is why men who are engaged exclusively in such work see "women's work," and the manual work of other men, not as real human activity, self-chosen and

consciously willed, but only as natural activity—a kind of instinctual labour such as bees and ants perform. Women in particular are thus excluded from men's conceptions of culture and history.

I agree that involvement in a combination of manual and intellectual work will yield a more adequate perspective, both because it includes a wider variety of knowledge and because it affords a better opportunity to understand the connection of one sort of work to the other. But it is difficult to imagine a group of individuals who engage exclusively in "ruling" activities. Even the extremely stereotypical professional or academic male who is described would mow his lawn, cook on the barbecue, or take care of at least some household responsibilities. Still, I have to agree that the importance our society accords to different types of work does make a difference in how the individual feels about work in general. What we do surely does in some measure shape what we know and, perhaps more importantly, how we regard our knowledge.

Tied to this argument is the next: that women's perspective comes from mediating ideological dualisms. The argument, as Harding summarises it, stresses the ways in which women's activities "mediate the divisions and separations in contemporary Western cultures between nature and culture and such manifestations of this polarity as intellectual work, on the one hand, and manual or emotional work, on the other hand" (Harding, 1991, p. 130). Nancy Hartsock (1983), for example, argues that the female experience of bearing and rearing children involves a unity of mind and body more profound than is

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possible in the activity of a male worker. My reaction to this latter argument is ambivalence. On one hand, Hartsock is right to point out the problems of focusing excessively on dualisms. While categories and distinctions are obviously always part of thinking, it is too easy to force dichotomies. It may be true that certain types of labour, or, more likely, socialising with and learning from people who perform certain types of labour, might predispose someone to think in ways that mediate ideological dualisms. On the other hand, I cannot help being suspicious of arguments such as this one that suggest it is precisely childbearing and rearing which give a woman the insight to overcome this dualism. I have argued above against an essentialist view of different "ways of knowing"; furthermore, this line of argument excludes far too many women and sympathetic men to be useful as a political strategy. Not all women bear and rear children, and many men also rear children, so this is not an argument for a "women's" perspective, but for a "mothers'" perspective. It is not necessary if, as I contend, it is possible for one individual to learn to adopt another's perspective.

The Importance of Perspective

One tension in the development of feminist philosophy of science is between a conception of research as having been badly done according to its own standards, and the belief that research programs as they have conventionally been conceived are in their very aims and methods wrongheaded. The empiricist approach involves understanding knowledge as

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the product of individuals. The responsibility of these individuals is to overcome personal bias to achieve a worldview from which it is possible to evaluate claims against the standard of "truth." The responsible investigator is understood to be unaffected by her or his social position and by the particular way in which that position allows for knowledge to be constructed. When research is going wrong, according to this conception of knowledge, it is because individuals are allowing personal bias to creep into their research. This bias may take the form of intentional manipulation of results, but it may also be unconscious. One important means for checking such bias is through the work of the community of which the researcher is a part. By checking on each other's work, the prejudices of individuals may be recognised and corrected by the community.

A contrary understanding of knowledge recognises the important connection between the researcher and the social positions within which this individual operates.[4] It is argued that researchers are, in practice, affected by their positions as raced, classed and gendered beings. In societies where power is organised hierarchically, for example by one of these categories, there is no archimedean perspective which is disinterested, impartial, value-free, or detached from the particular historical and social relations in which everyone participates. Further, theorists from this perspective maintain that because the social groups within which the individual lives affect the individual's relationship to knowledge, there is an important sense in which the social group shares in

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[4] In Chapter Two I will discuss alternatives to the empiricist position in more detail, in particular the pragmatist understanding of knowledge development.

the individual's view. Because of this strong relationship between the individual and the group, knowledge is understood to be a group rather than an individual experience. The variety of social groups to which an individual belongs will overlap, and so will the variety of perspectives available to that person. Thus, the problem as seen through this view is not bad research (i.e., research which is not neutral), but the way in which research has been conceived (i.e., the very fact that research has tried to be neutral).

It is reasonable to assume that certain perspectives are more likely to be neglected or diminished in importance if they come from a position of relatively less status or power. Because powerful groups can both legitimise and disseminate their perspectives, for example through teaching and publishing, the people with less power will have access to the dominant perspective as well. The person with less power will either be "colonised" and lose her or his perspective, or will learn a kind of epistemic bilingualism. The more powerful person does not always have the same access to an alternative perspective. This, I would argue, is why the perspective of a relatively less powerful person is more likely to be more inclusive (or at the least less partial). It is not because of any epistemic privilege inherent in the less powerful person's perspective.

Standpoint theories, then, do not convince me that a feminist perspective is epistemically superior to that of a non-feminist. The theories do have other important insights to offer, however, such as the importance of taking into account the material position of the researcher and of ensuring a balanced

quantity of research which both studies and starts from the perspective of previously excluded groups such as women, the working classes, people from the developing world, and the list continues. Harding argues that the natural sciences are illuminatingly conceptualised as part of the social sciences. By this, she means that the social sciences (and this is particularly true in education research and other "quasi-experimental" and ethnographic models) acknowledge the interaction of the researcher with the object of research and the ways in which both are affected by this interaction. The social sciences also take explicit account of the moral implications of a program of research, and Harding would have researchers in the natural sciences do the same. Rather than conceiving the social sciences as imperfect natural sciences, we should take the tools used by social scientists and employ them in the natural sciences as well.

Objectivity and Feminist Epistemology

An extremely compelling concept arising from her elaboration of standpoint theory is what Harding has called "strong objectivity." Strong objectivity is distinguished from the standard versions of objectivity by the way it treats the relationship between the content of a scientific statement or hypothesis and the purpose the statement serves in the broader network of arguments that make up the scientist's perspective.

The argument is similar to one offered by Richard Paul (1987) in defence of what he calls "critical thinking in the strong sense." Paul argues that while it

may be useful to analyse an argument atomically, that is, by looking within it and using formal logic to determine its validity, it is equally important to look outside the argument to see the purpose the argument is serving and to see its relationship to arguments around it. Paul argues that most students who believe they are engaged in critical thinking tend to justify only those commitments they already hold, and to condemn only those commitments with which they already disagree. Critical thinking in the strong sense, he says, demands that the thinker question those commitments and the arguments that legitimise them. Like Paul's discussion of critical thinking in the strong sense, Harding's strong objectivity requires an examination of both the internal validity of an argument or program of research and the part that argument or program plays in the larger network of arguments or the research program.

Harding criticises "weak objectivity" (her term for the standard versions of objectivity) for being both too broad and too narrow. It is too narrow, she argues, in two ways. First, it is concerned only to evaluate the methods of inquiry not the broader network of arguments within which a claim fits. "Real science," as understood by empiricists, is concerned only with the justification of a hypothesis. It has nothing to say about the formulation of that hypothesis. Second, the means by which objectivity is reached, generally some version of intersubjectivity, is suited to identifying and eliminating only those social values and interests that differ between the scientists and researchers who have been deemed competent to judge. Scientific communities develop when a number of

researchers are working on similar problems, and they are perpetuated by the process of educating and accrediting new researchers. The community itself and the process of educating neophyte researchers tend to lead toward a consensus; the very fact that there is a community indicates that its members share at least a certain number of commitments and presuppositions. I will argue that we can broaden the range of these commitments and thus increase the effectiveness of intersubjectivity.

While "weak objectivity" is too narrow for the reasons just offered, Harding argues that it is also too broad. Standard empiricist arguments require that researchers eliminate as much social bias as possible, and that the more successful we are in eliminating such bias the more objective our results will be. A commitment to strong objectivity, on the other hand, entails the recognition that not all social values and interests have the same bad effects upon the results of research (Harding, 1991, p. 144). This is where the feminist standpoint becomes important. Harding is arguing two things. First, that it is impossible to eliminate bias completely. I suspect anyone espousing standard versions of objectivity would agree. What is more important, however, she argues that even in theory, the only way to eliminate bias completely would be to remove the theoretical perspective from which a researcher operates, and this would not be desirable, even if it were possible. Harding argues that research which originates from a feminist standpoint will generate less partial and less faulty knowledge. My thesis is that while the mere fact that an argument is

feminist does not make it automatically preferable, the standpoint theories do, nevertheless, remind us of the extremely important role that our material position plays in the development of perspective. A researcher who holds a feminist perspective will likely choose different subjects of research and different methods of study. The standpoint theories remind us that this is so, and draw our attention to why a feminist perspective is valuable.

While I do not agree that certain material positions, in and of themselves, provide access to more complete or more objective research, I argue that the ability to recognise and acknowledge an alternative perspective can play an important role in the development of any program of research. From an "outsider" position, it is often easier to recognise contradictions between and among commitments held by individuals within a group. Theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1986) have made this argument in other contexts. Furthermore, it is often easier to recognise contradictions between the commitments a group espouses and the programs of research it may choose. Research programs can be self-defeating, but this might be difficult to see through the eyes of someone who has a great deal invested in the success of the program.

I would offer two further reasons for including as wide a variety of perspectives as possible in any community of inquiry. First, it seems clear that historically certain programs of research have been neglected because they would have required starting research from the position of those with less power.

Our professed commitment to justice alone argues for the inclusion of research that "starts from women's lives" and the lives of other historically marginalised groups. Second, intersubjectivity should be as broadly construed as possible. Researchers should make it a practice to take on a number of relevant perspectives as a means of better checking their own. It is important for individual researchers to take into account not only the dominant perspective and not only the perspective most readily available, but also a variety of different worldviews.

Having shown the need for a stronger version of objectivity, Harding nowhere offers a concise description of her conception of strong objectivity. In her discussion of the concept, she states:

> To enact or operationalize the directive of strong objectivity is to value the Other's perspective and to pass over in thought into the social condition that creates it... in order to look back at the self in all its cultural particularity from a more distant, critical, objectifying location. (Harding, 1991, p. 151)

A little later she says, "strong objectivity requires that we investigate the relation between subject and object rather than deny the existence of, or seek unilateral control over, this relation" (Harding, 1991, p. 152). This seems to me to be the heart of the concept, but strong objectivity is so important to the thesis I am

developing that it demands a more straightforward definition. As I am using the concept, "strong objectivity" is an ideal. Like the standard versions of objectivity, it cannot be fully achieved, but a commitment to it will maximise not only the morality of a scientific enterprise but the value of the knowledge produced. It works as a set of standards against which to evaluate the adequacy of one's moral perspective. It entails critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most complete or the least distorted value claims. It offers a means not for overcoming the material positions of participants in a discourse, but for understanding and responding to them. Here is my definition:

> **Strong objectivity is an ideal which employs a set of standards including respect, reflexivity, and critical evaluation of social situations to challenge inquirers to maximise their objectivity. They do this through recognising and testing not only the content of their knowledge claims but also the purpose these claims play in the development of research programs. A commitment to strong objectivity entails attempting to understand the partiality of one's own perspective and recognising how that partiality distorts one's perception.**

The Development of Research Programs

I have argued that it is important not only to evaluate the content of a knowledge claim, but also to understand the relationship between the claim and the role it plays in a broader network of claims and arguments. Strong objectivity offers a means for doing that. By acknowledging the importance of the social, political or moral perspective leading to an argument or a claim, and by recognising at the same time the partiality of that perspective, a commitment to strong objectivity leads to an understanding of how research programs develop and how they are guided.

There are at least two good reasons to adopt the ideal of strong objectivity in evaluating research programs. First, the paradigm guiding a program of research will determine, to a large extent, what evidence is uncovered. A scientist does not and could not record every possible observation, but only those things judged to be significant according to the accepted paradigm. The observations that are recorded, the manner in which they are recorded, and the role they play in confirming or disproving the hypothesis are all subject to human error and to conscious or unconscious manipulation. Weak objectivity in the form of intersubjectivity will help identify some of these errors, but only a commitment to strong objectivity suggests clues as to where to look for errors and omissions. It does this by reminding the researcher of the relationship between theory and observation. It also challenges individual researchers to interrogate and to understand their own

perspectives, and to treat criticisms of their perspectives respectfully, especially when the criticisms come from alternative perspectives which occupy positions of less privilege.

Second, the standpoint theorists point to ways in which some perspectives are devalued, marginalised, or excluded either because they are not understood by those holding the dominant perspective or because they directly challenge that perspective. Regardless of whether the standpoint theorists are justified in arguing that the less powerful perspective is epistemologically superior (and I have argued that they are not), a commitment to justice requires at the very least that the less powerful view be evaluated for its potential as a competing or complementary perspective. The first step has to be an acknowledgement that the dominant perspective is, in fact, partial.

Beyond accepting the partiality of the dominant perspective, researchers have a responsibility to acknowledge that they have a clearer view in certain contexts and a more cloudy view in others. Weak objectivity can point out errors and contradictions within a given perspective, but only on its own terms. Strong objectivity calls into question the agenda behind the hypothesis, the motive behind the observations, and the commitments behind the logic. In doing so, it may provide clues as to where unseen or unconscious manipulation of results or rationalisation of contradictions exist. A commitment to strong objectivity challenges us to avoid sophistic justifications and to question the way in which

knowledge develops and the responsibility of individual researchers in guiding that development.

There is the danger, in adopting strong objectivity, that a researcher may achieve a false sense of confidence that all "hidden agendas" have been exposed. Still, the very acknowledgement that there is no way to uncover all motives or commitments represents a positive shift away from the empiricism that calls for weak objectivity.

Summary

I have argued in this chapter that the feminist standpoint theories offer important insights into the ways in which knowledge is developed and justified, particularly by pointing out the importance of the material position of the researcher. But I have also argued that it is wrong to believe that a position of marginality gives rise directly to epistemic privilege. It may often be that individuals who occupy marginal positions do have access to broader knowledge and more complete understanding than do those in positions of more power. But where this is true, it is due (indirectly) to the ability of the more powerful voice to disseminate knowledge. The less powerful voice has access to both perspectives, which is not always true for the more powerful. For this reason, the perspective which arises from a marginal position has access to a wider understanding of both the claims of knowledge and the ways in which claims are

justified. I will return to this argument, and offer examples of how I believe it works, in Chapters Four and Five.

I have discussed Harding's conception of strong objectivity in some detail. I have argued that even without the understanding of epistemic privilege to which Harding ties it, it is a powerful tool for understanding one's own perspective and the relationship of individuals to their knowledge traditions. In Chapters Two and Three I will discuss the relationship between scientific knowledge and moral knowledge, and I will offer an alternative understanding of the most responsible means of dealing with moral disagreement. Strong objectivity does not return to my argument until Chapters Four and Five, when I discuss the uses to which we can put it in the development of moral knowledge.

Both natural and social scientists have a moral and an epistemological responsibility to continue to include more previously marginalised perspectives into mainstream academic research. Morally, a commitment to justice requires it. Epistemologically, more inclusion will result in broader intersubjectivity and more varied interrogation of the dominant perspective. Both of these are claims I will return to as my argument develops.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Relationship Between Scientific Knowledge and Moral Knowledge.

Overview

In Chapter One I offered an overview of different prominent theories of feminist epistemology. I briefly discussed the main differences between feminist empiricism, the feminist standpoint theories, and feminist postmodernism. My focus was on philosophy of science because that is the context for Harding's elaboration of standpoint theory and of strong objectivity. In this chapter I will argue that moral knowledge can be developed and justified in much the same way as can scientific knowledge. Following the pragmatist arguments of Dewey and especially of Putnam, I will argue that moral knowledge and scientific knowledge are not different sorts of knowledge; they merely describe different sorts of things. They are employed together in virtually any type of inquiry, they depend on each other, and we can use the same norms of justification for both. I will contrast the pragmatist view of knowledge with the positivism which I believe it is safe to say most westerners are brought up to accept.

Most people brought up within the western, modern worldview, have a common-sense understanding of knowledge development, and especially of scientific inquiry, that is at its root positivist and dichotomises facts and values. Positivists argue that factual claims and value claims should be sharply distinguished and treated differently. Factual claims are taken to be more

trustworthy and more objective; their meaning will not change over time or from one community to another. Where there is disagreement, it must be because someone either does not understand or has made a mistake. Moral knowledge, in the positivist view, cannot be tested in the same ways and so it is not as trustworthy. I will show that there are important problems with the positivist view of knowledge and of inquiry, and that a more reasonable view is articulated by pragmatists.

In the pragmatist account of knowledge, there is no fundamental dichotomy between facts and values, and it is accepted that knowledge is the creation of communities rather than of individuals. The shared nature of knowledge changes the way we treat the correspondence between knowledge and reality. I will argue following Dewey that both scientific inquiry and moral inquiry require a democratic community of inquirers. I will further argue following Putnam that ultimately our values in both science and ethics are constructed, as are the standards we use to justify them. I will briefly look at what it might mean to be a feminist pragmatist, and finally I will argue following Stout that science and ethics are two aspects of a single rational and objective process, and that we can use the same methods of inquiry and the same norms of justification for each.

Positivism

Positivists maintain that everything we know comes to us through our senses. Through our senses we perceive the world, and we report what we perceive. Ernst Mach and members of the Vienna Circle argued that whatever we take to be a fact comes to us from our sensory experience of the world. Two important distinctions follow: first, we have to separate our sensory experiences from our aesthetic and moral judgements, which early positivists did through the "verification principle," and second, we have to try to keep our statements of fact uncontaminated by the theories to which we are committed. An explanation of how this is done is articulated through the theory of phenomenalism. Finally, positivists maintain that knowledge is acquired by individuals and is developed by individuals (as opposed to recent epistemologists, including pragmatists, who argue that knowledge is the creation of epistemological communities).

The separation of fact statements from value statements is fundamental to the positivist account of knowledge. Vienna Circle positivists employed a criterion of meaning they called the verification principle, which maintains that the meaning of a statement is determined by the way in which it can be verified, where "verified" means tested by empirical or logical means. Statements about things that we can observe are considered to be "strongly verifiable" because they can be compared to the direct evidence offered by one's senses. Statements of fact which are not available for direct confirmation by one's senses are considered to be "weakly verifiable." While they cannot be verified

as directly or as conclusively, they can be confirmed or disconfirmed by appeal to other statements which are conclusively verifiable. Thus, non-observation statements are only "weakly verifiable" but they are still meaningful. Metaphysical statements are not verifiable as they are not susceptible to empirical testing; therefore, following the verification principle, they are meaningless. According to Vienna Circle positivists, statements of value only express the state of mind of the speaker; they are emotive and so can be neither true nor false. Of course, positivists concede that language has other uses besides imparting factual information. While metaphysical statements and statements of aesthetic or moral judgement convey information which is important in certain contexts, they do not state facts and so they do not help us understand the world.

Verificationism allowed the positivists to dismiss metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics, saying that they were, literally, not meaningful. Knowledge claims were confined to statements about observable entities. But, as Putnam argues, eventually even the strictest empiricist has to rely on theories which cannot be verified by observation:

> Saying that when I say that electrons are flowing through a wire I
> am talking about observables is just as much being a
> metaphysician as saying that electrons are things in themselves.
> (Putnam, 1995, p. 44)

Putnam argues that Mach and his followers had simply exchanged one metaphysics for another. And, of course, since the verification principle itself is neither logical nor empirical, it must itself be meaningless by its own criteria. According to logical positivism, an inquirer must attempt to observe and to describe things as they exist "in themselves." As Putnam puts it, this is an attempt to describe the world in the world's own language. But there is no such thing as the world's own language, Putnam writes. There are only the languages that we language users invent for our various purposes (Putnam, 1995, p, 29).

Phenomenalism is the name of one theory explaining the relationship between strongly and weakly verifiable statements. Following phenomenalism, non-observation statements are equivalent in meaning to a (probably very long) list of statements about what would be observed under different circumstances (Dancy, 1985, p. 89). Neo-positivists, like Quine, do not accept the theory of phenomenalism. Quine argues, for example, that theory is always underdetermined by data. This means that for a given set of data we could imagine any number of possible theories to explain it. Nelson (1990, p. 113 and following) suggests that the best way to understand Quine's point is to start with an example like quantum theory. Most philosophers of science, Nelson suggests, have little or no trouble recognising that the things we say in quantum theory, the generalisations we make, the objects we posit, and so on, exceed all the evidence for that theory. That is, we can easily imagine other theories

which, while they would be incompatible with quantum theory, would nevertheless be entirely commensurate with all the evidence we currently have for quantum theory. The point, Nelson says, is about evidence. Quantum theory is underdetermined by all the evidence we have for it.

It is not controversial to suggest that quantum theory, given its current stage of development, is underdetermined by evidence. But Quine's point is that the most commonplace things we say and take for granted about physical objects are no less underdetermined by evidence that is quantum theory. Following Quine, we have to be prepared to consider that alternatives to our current theories about physical objects, while they may not be compatible with our understandings, might nonetheless be commensurate with all the evidence we have for the objects we consider. It is also conceivable that at some time in the future we might give up any or all of our current theories and adopt new ones which, while they may be incompatible with those we currently hold, would nevertheless cohere to most or all of what we currently count as evidence.

A final crucial element of the positivist account of knowledge is the way positivists conceive of the knower. Positivists conceive humans as essentially separate individuals, and therefore view the attainment of knowledge as a project for each individual on her or his own (Jaggar, 1983, p. 355). The task of epistemology then is to formulate rules to enable any individual to undertake this project with success. The preferred alternative of theorists like Harding, and Jaggar (quoted above) is the materialism required by the standpoint theories.

Their argument is that because an inquirer brings the theories and commitments which flow from her or his material position, any responsible description of inquiry must take this into account.

Putnam argues instead for a pragmatic view in which knowledge is understood to be constructed by groups of people together. Putnam writes that for positivists such as Carnap and Reichenbach the most primitive form of scientific inquiry was induction by simple enumeration. The model is always a single scientist who determines, through induction, the colours of the balls remaining in the urn. For the pragmatists, Putnam writes, the model is a *group* of inquirers trying to produce good ideas and trying to test them to see which ones have value (Putnam, 1995, p. 71).

Pragmatism

Writing at around the time of the Vienna Circle, early pragmatists, particularly James, refused to dichotomise facts and theories. Although they did distinguish the two, they argued that each was inextricably linked to the other. While today the idea that knowledge of facts presupposes knowledge of theories is not controversial, it was so at the time. James also refused to dichotomise facts and values, but this understanding of the relationship between facts and values, Putnam writes, is as controversial today as it was in James' day. To understand why Putnam believes we should accept it, it is appropriate to look more closely at the pragmatist view of knowledge.

Pragmatism, as Putnam describes it, is not so much a systematic theory, and certainly not a metaphysical one, but rather, it is a collection of theses which are often articulated very differently from one philosopher to the next, and which became the basis for the philosophies of Peirce, and above all James and Dewey. There are four main theses: (1) antiskepticism—the position that doubt requires justification just as much as belief; (2) fallibilism—the position that there is no guarantee that a particular belief will never need revision; (3) the thesis that there is no fundamental dichotomy between facts and values; (4) the thesis that practice is primary in philosophy (Putnam, 1994, p. 152). "That one can be both fallibilistic *and* antiskeptical," Putnam suggests, "is perhaps *the* basic insight of American Pragmatism" (Putnam, 1995, p. 21).

Pragmatists reject the model of knowledge development as an algorithm, like a computer program. According to pragmatists, whether the subject is science or ethics, what we have are maxims, not algorithms, and maxims require contextual interpretation (Putnam, 1995, p. 71). Pragmatists believe not only that knowledge is developed by and within communities, but also that the means for justifying such knowledge is also determined by the community. James believed that since our claims get their substance from the roles they play in our lives, an account of truth will gain its substance from the accompanying account of how to get to truth (Putnam, 1995, p. 12). Dewey wrote that standards and practices must be developed together and constantly revised by a delicate procedure of mutual adjustment. The standards by which we judge and compare

our moral images are themselves creations as much as are the moral images (Putnam, 1987, p. 79).

Within knowledge-producing communities, individuals must form shared concepts. This does not mean that they have access to a pre-conceptual common reality. It simply means that the reality, as it is perceived, is created and shared by the whole community. Putnam writes that while our concepts may be culturally relative, it does not follow that the truth is simply "decided by the culture" (Putnam, 1987, p. 20).

Inquiry and Ethics; Facts and Values

In Chapter Three I will offer Lovibond's understanding of how a moral tradition can be both relativist in the sense that Putnam is using the term here, and absolutist in the sense that we still have good reasons for believing the things that our culture teaches are true. Lovibond argues that to grow up in a moral tradition does not mean to be a slave to it. In Chapter Four I will argue, following Benahbib, that responsible development of our moral tradition requires an understanding of the responsibility we have as adult, competent participants, and I will show how, in Harding's language, "democracy-advancing projects" are likely to offer us both a more just world and a broader and more "true" understanding of it. Much of what I will argue in that section depends on an understanding of the dependence of inquiry on ethics and of ethics on inquiry. I

will offer here Dewey's argument in favour of the interdependence of ethics and inquiry.

As Putnam reports, Dewey argues that any kind of inquiry is closely connected to the ethics of the enterprise. For Dewey, inquiry is co-operative human interaction with an environment, and both the active manipulation of the environment and the co-operation with other human beings are vital. In order for that co-operation to be effective, it must take a form, Putnam argues, very similar to the "discourse ethics" advocated by Habermas and Apel (Putnam, 1994, p. 172). Where the opportunity to challenge accepted hypotheses is unreasonably limited or where questions or suggestions are systematically ignored, the scientific enterprise suffers. When relations among scientists become relations of hierarchy and dependence, or when scientists instrumentalise other scientists, again the scientific enterprise suffers. Putnam argues, following Dewey, that both for its full development and for its full application to human problems, science requires the democratisation of inquiry (Putnam, 1994, p. 173).[5]

When people say that fact statements (science knowledge) are different altogether from value statements (moral knowledge) they usually want to say that facts can be justified in a way that values cannot. Putnam calls this the "argument from non-controversiality." The idea, he says, is that the hallmark of cognitive status is, in some way, the possibility of becoming "public" knowledge;

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[5] In Chapter Three I will outline Habermas's arguments in support of discourse ethics in fuller detail. The concept will become important to my argument in Chapters Four and Five. My purpose here is merely to offer Putnam's observation that Dewey's understanding of cooperative inquiry is close to Habermas's development of discourse ethics.

i.e., of becoming non-controversial (Putnam, 1987, p. 63). People argue that "facts" can be demonstrated "scientifically"; if there is controversy over the truth of a fact, it is because we have not yet performed enough experiments or amassed enough data. What is a fact can "in principle" be established in a way that will command the assent of all "rational persons," where this is often taken to mean all *educated* persons, or all *intelligent* persons. Value statements, on the other hand, express the opinion or disposition of the speaker. But Putnam argues that very little science is as uncontroversial as this makes it sound. Furthermore, social scientific knowledge, for example historical knowledge, is rarely open to the kind of confirmation that is required, but we would not say that there are no such things as historical facts. Putnam says that one possible conclusion is to take the view that all such knowledge is subjective, and a consequence might be the attitude that "truth" in such matters is to be determined by imposing one's will; "the true political philosophy is the one that succeeds in resisting attempts to overthrow it" (Putnam, 1987, p. 70).

What is wrong with this relativistic view, Putnam says, is that it does not correspond to how we think and how we shall continue to think.

> The heart of pragmatism... was the insistence on the supremacy
> of the agent point of view. If we find that we must take a certain
> point of view, use a certain "conceptual system," when we are
> engaged in practical activity, in the widest sense of "practical

activity," then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that

it is not really "the way things are in themselves." (Putnam, 1987,

p. 70)

This kind of thinking leads to two intellectual errors, Putnam argues. First, it

leads one to debase the notion of *belief*, and second it leads one to indulge in

the fiction that there is a God's Eye point of view that we can usefully imagine.

But Putnam concedes that while he cannot prove relativist accounts are

untrue, he can go so far as to say that he does not subscribe to them and

believes he has good reasons to avoid doing so. His purpose is to show that

arguments such as those employed by positivists to establish a fact-value

dualism based on the non-controversiality of facts as against the overwhelming

controversiality of values are misguided. He wants to show that facts and values

can be treated in the same way. "No sane person should believe that something

is 'subjective' merely because it cannot be settled beyond controversy" (Putnam,

1987, p. 71).

Our concepts may be culturally relative, but it does not follow that the

truth or falsity of everything we say using these concepts is simply "decided by

culture." What, then, is it decided by? Our knowledge develops in particular

directions because it suits our purposes to have it do so, but these purposes are

not invented arbitrarily. Putnam argues that to say we construct knowledge

(both scientific and moral) is very much like saying that we construct artifacts.

The fact that we make knives, for example, does not mean that there are not better or worse knives in the world; they are judged according to how well they serve our purposes. But they are not judged against an "ideal" knife, or a knife as the universe would create it. In the same way, our knowledge is judged according to the uses it serves for us, but we can still say that we have better and worse theories or better and worse ethics. Dewey writes that because there are real human needs, and not merely desires, it makes sense to distinguish between better and worse values. What, then, are these pre-existing human needs and how are they distinguished from desires? Here Putnam reports that Dewey says these needs are not pre-existing, but that humanity is constantly redesigning itself and re-creating its needs.

> Our notions—the notion of a value, the notion of a moral image,
> the notion of a standard, the notion of a need—are so
> intertwined that none of them can provide a "foundation" for
> ethics.... We must come to see that there is no possibility of a
> "foundation" for ethics, just as we have come to see that there is
> no possibility of a "foundation" for scientific knowledge, or for
> any other kind of knowledge (Putnam, 1987, p. 79).

Putnam concludes that because our standards are created, and because our values are created, ultimately the only defence is to say, with Wittgenstein: This

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is where my spade is turned. To say this is not to say something irrevocable, but it is to say that now, here, I will say this and do this. "One does not have to believe in a unique *best* moral version, or a unique *best* mathematical version. What we have are *better and worse* versions, and that *is* objectivity" (Putnam, 1987, p. 77). This leads to the question of why we believe in our commitments at all. Putnam says that we have an "underived," a "primitive" obligation to adhere to our commitments. This is not, he says, a moral obligation, but it is nevertheless a very real obligation.

Putnam concludes that we have to reject the project of epistemology which would have us describe a "Universal Method" for telling who has "reason on his side" no matter what the dispute. Still, we should not be dismayed by this because we can still direct our attention to other interesting things. Above all he says he hopes to redirect philosophical energy to one of its very traditional tasks: the task of providing meaningful, important and discussible images of the human situation in the world (Putnam, 1987, p. 86). The purpose of philosophy, Putnam argues, is as Dewey stated it: the criticism of beliefs, institutions, customs and policies with respect to their bearing upon the good (Putnam, 1995, p. 51).

Dewey rejects dichotomising the instrumental and terminal goals of inquiry. Even when we are engaged in goal-oriented activity, Putnam tells us, we are also guided by norms of rationality which have become terminal values

for us, and which cannot be separated from the modern conception of rationality itself.

> It is not, *for us*, any longer just a sociological-descriptive fact that
>
> choosing theories for their predictive power and simplicity, and
>
> fostering democratic co-operation and openness to criticism in
>
> the generation and evaluation of theories, are part of the nature
>
> of scientific inquiry; these norms describe the way we *ought* to
>
> function when the aim is knowledge (Putnam, 1994, p. 173).

It seems to me that power relations function as a fundamental part of discourse, if not of all our rational engagements with other people. Solitary musings may be free from relations of power, certainly; but even a thoughtful engagement with a like-minded individual will involve, at least provisionally or temporarily, an element of persuasion. Within the most equal of relationships and in the most harmonious of discussions one can expect the power to shift back and forth, but it will never be absent. Power relations are unavoidable and have a particularly strong impact on the relationship between a teacher and a student, because not only is teaching explicitly about trying to persuade, the teacher has access to a great deal of institutional authority. But it is also true that teachers often engage with the purpose of helping to share that power. I try to persuade my students because I do believe that what I am saying is correct.

At the same time I try to engage them in a way that does not compromise my vision of a democratic discourse. One of my important goals, and I believe this goal is shared by most people we would call educators, is to help my students develop the tools they will use to themselves engage in the discourse. It sounds contradictory but I use my power over them to try to help them to develop their own powers.

What is missing from Putnam's account is an acknowledgement of the importance of the power relationship in knowledge justification. The discourse has a power to convince: some arguments are more logical, and some more accurately describe reality as we experience it. But there is also the power relationship among the participants, and between those "producing" and those "consuming" the knowledge. In Chapter Five I will suggest ways that I think teachers can work to democratise their relationships with their students through taking account of the intellectual and institutional power that they hold.

What Would a Feminist Pragmatist Look Like?

Putnam's conclusion that we are ultimately left without any reasons for our "foundational" commitments, because they are not available for rational defence, is a troubling one for feminist teachers. We are committed to our political and moral positions, and we are in the situation of trying to persuade others to agree with us. Rorty writes that pragmatism is neutral between feminism and masculinism except when it rebuts masculinist arguments that

essentialise or naturalise the oppression of women. "When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace" (Rorty, 1993, p. 97). But Nelson (1993) argues that while a feminist pragmatist will agree that knowledge is socially constructed, she will not abandon the impact of experience and of her observations. Nelson says, and I agree, that communities that construct and acquire knowledge are not merely collections of independently knowing individuals; such communities are epistemologically prior to individuals who know. The observations of a feminist pragmatist will be informed by the theories and commitments she shares with other feminists who are the members of her epistemological community.

Putnam argues that the thing that saves us from relativism is our "primitive" obligation to our foundational commitments coupled with antiskepticism which allows us to require reasons to doubt that the world is the way we think it is. I agree with Rorty that we cannot expect a pragmatic approach to inquiry to give us direct reasons to be feminists, but following the arguments of Dewey which I have just offered (and those of Habermas which I will outline in Chapter Three), we do have good reasons to privilege democratic discourse. Dewey wants us to invite as many people as possible into the discourse; to include each one fully and to accord them equal respect (which is, of course, not to be confused with necessarily believing everything each one says). These values are integral to most feminist projects as well, and particularly suited to the

discussions opened up by standpoint theorists, who write about the importance

of including marginalised voices. So while pragmatism does not offer an

epistemological justification for feminism, it provides a means of understanding

and justifying knowledge that is in keeping with feminist commitments to justice

and to inclusion. This brings me to the question of whether we can treat moral

knowledge in the same way.

To What Extent are Scientific and Moral Inquiries Similar?

It makes sense to me to think of knowledge, or of inquiry, as generally

falling into three general categories. Empirical knowledge involves observations

and experience. Logical knowledge includes math and many types of

philosophy or theoretical physics. Finally, there is moral knowledge. Common

sense understanding of these, which I suggested at the beginning of this chapter

owes a great deal to the positivists, puts different sorts of knowledge on a kind of

continuum with moral knowledge assumed to be mostly or even totally

constructed by society or society in interaction with its vision of the supernatural.

While logic and math are obviously human constructions, they are assumed to

be more generalisable and more available to wide agreement across cultures. It

is often assumed that mathematical knowledge and logical knowledge are more

easily freed from the biases of social contexts. Quine would say they are more

objective in the sense that more people will agree about claims made within

mathematical or logical contexts. Empirical knowledge can fall in different

places along this continuum, depending on the discipline from which it comes. "Hard" sciences are closer to logic while social sciences are closer to morals. It is further assumed, by positivists at any rate, that we have more reason to believe statements that are closer to the math/logic side; these statements are taken to be more trustworthy and more generally true. Statements that fall closer to the moral side are more suspect; we are more comfortable saying, "That's just your opinion." This is why Durkheim, for example, wanted to conceive of sociology as a science. Even within sociology there is a division between statistical and ethnographic research traditions.

According to the pragmatist account of knowledge, "hard" scientific inquiry is not seen to be as separate from moral inquiry. Stout (1988), for example, argues that science and ethics are two aspects of the same rational and objective process. Neither one is as objective as science is sometimes made to seem, and neither one is as capricious as ethics is often portrayed to be. Furthermore, both should be tested by the same means.

I offered earlier Putnam's response to what he called the "argument from non-controversiality" which suggests that scientific knowledge enjoys a consensus impossible for knowledge in the moral realm to achieve. Stout makes a similar argument to Putnam's but discusses at greater length the reasons we have this "common sense" perception that scientists agree while ethicists do not. He suggests that one reason why we might have trouble noticing scientific disagreement is because most of us stop taking science courses before we get

into areas of heated debate (Stout, 1988, p. 43). We have little knowledge of sophisticated scientific discourse which is where most of the disagreement lies. We pay less attention to moral agreement because we are initiated into moral consensus as very young children. By the time we begin reflecting on the difference between moral and scientific discourses we already know enough about moral language to engage in debate. Most of us never reach that level of education in scientific discourse, whereas ethics courses do not bother to rehearse countless platitudes assented to by nearly everybody in our culture. The first week's reading is already in disputed territory (Stout, 1988, p, 43). When we say, then, that math or scientific knowledge is non-controversial we are thinking about basic facts like the elementary laws of physics, whereas we know that ethical debates such as those we see in the newspapers and in the legislature are far more difficult to agree upon. But a more appropriate analogy might be between basic facts in physics and basic moral facts such as the knowledge that harming innocent people is wrong, or, on the other hand, between the debate over a dying person's right to assisted suicide and the debate over the existence and nature of black holes.

Stout argues that since scientific and moral knowledge are, at their root, the same, they should both be tested by the same means; both scientific facts and moral facts are judged valid if they correspond to the reality they describe.

In the eyes of a modest pragmatism [one which stops short of

the temptation to define truth], true moral propositions

correspond to the moral facts in the same (epistemologically

trivial) sense that true scientific propositions correspond to the

scientific facts. (Stout, 1988, p. 250)

The pragmatist account of knowledge which I have presented assumes that

scientific inquiry should not attempt to describe the world "as the world would

describe itself"; rather, the purpose of science knowledge is to describe the

world as we experience it. Our scientific theories are judged accurate insofar as

they correspond to our observations. These observations will, in turn, be

informed by the network of theories to which the observer subscribes. But to say

that a variety of possible theories could describe any set of observations is

decidedly not to say that any theory will do, or that there is no way to compare

the adequacy of competing theories. This is precisely where rational

judgements must be employed.

The same is true in moral inquiry. As Putnam argues, believing that

ethical objectivity is possible is not the same thing as believing that there are no

undecidable cases or no problems which cannot be definitively solved. But

neither is this true of scientific inquiry. In science a statement or theory which is

considered to be true will correspond to the natural world. In morals, I argue that

the correspondence would be between our theories and our moral feelings and

emotions[6] and between our theories and the practical results of their application. Of course, ultimately moral inquirers must acknowledge, as will responsible scientific inquirers as well, that they are acting in accord with the commitments of their community and that, as Putnam says, at a certain point there are no reasons they can give to justify our fundamental commitments. Stout summarises as follows:

> Since modest pragmatism finds the idea of correspondence to undescribed reality incoherent when pressed into epistemological service, it allows us to up-grade moral truth to philosophical respectability without inventing what J.L. Mackie called "queer" entities (like values) with which moral propositions might correspond. And because it avoids putting a reductive or relativistic substitute in place of the old definition of truth as correspondence, it achieves its levelling of moral and scientific truth without downgrading the latter—without, for example, reducing the truth of scientific propositions to mere assertibility. (Stout, 1988, p. 250)

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[6] In Chapter Three I will offer Lovibond's articulation of moral realism in support of this argument. For discussions of why we should not insist on separating our emotions from rational inquiry, see Jaggar (1989) and Scheffler (1977).

Putnam argues that once we give up the metaphysical claim that there cannot be such a thing as ethical objectivity, and once we observe that objectivity in other areas is strongly connected with values, we can begin to see not just that ethical objectivity might be possible, but, more important, that investigating ethical problems requires just the values that have come to be linked with the open society (Putnam, 1994, p. 176).

Summary

Putnam writes that for pragmatists like John Dewey, moral disagreement of the kind that we find in an open society was not a metaphysical problem but a political problem and a challenge:

> The problem is to keep moral disagreement within the bounds of community and productive co-operation, and the challenge is to make moral disagreement serve as a stimulus to the kind of criticism of institutions and values that is needed for progress toward justice and progress in enabling citizens to live in accordance with their various conceptions of the good life.
> (Putnam, 1994, p. 155)

In this chapter I have argued that the pragmatist understanding of knowledge is superior to the positivist view which is so much part of the western "common

sense" with which most of us have grown up. It is superior, to my mind (and useful for my purposes), largely because of its refusal to dichotomise facts from the theories in which they arise, because of its recognition of the close relationship between inquiry and ethics, and because of its insistence that moral knowledge and scientific knowledge are to be justified in similar ways. In Chapter Three I will examine alternative understandings of moral disagreement offered by MacIntyre, Lovibond, and Habermas. In later chapters, I will attempt to convince the reader that Dewey's statement of the problem and challenge posed by moral disagreement can be related to Lovibond's articulation of moral realism and Habermas's development of discourse ethics. I will argue that these three share a common goal which is the same as the ideal articulated by Harding as strong objectivity. I will further argue that the methods Dewey and Habermas call for have much in common with the method of inquiry Harding suggests.

CHAPTER THREE:

Three Responses to the Problem of Moral Disagreement

Overview of the Three Theories

In Chapter Two I offered the positivist view of scientific knowledge development and the pragmatist alternative. I argued that the pragmatist account is a more appropriate way to understand scientific knowledge and that moral knowledge can be treated in very much the same way as scientific knowledge. In this chapter I will continue to explore moral knowledge development and appropriate means of justifying a moral position. I will do so by examining three additional alternatives to the type of moral theory which follows from a positivist perspective: MacIntyre's version of communitarianism, Lovibond's discussion of moral realism, and Habermas's theory of communicative action.

The moral perspective to which I am offering these alternatives is reflected in some forms of liberalism; it is the moral and political counterpart to the empiricism and more specifically to the positivism which I discussed in Chapter Two. Its focus is on free agency and the duty of the individual to make responsible decisions. It draws attention to the moral agent's ability to perceive directly and to make rational decisions based on the outcomes predicted from these perceptions. In the empirical world of scientific inquiry this is relatively straightforward; a statement is compared with the authority of one's observations

of the physical world. In the moral realm it is more problematic because without an external authority such as the physical world there is no way to "rationally" evaluate the truth of a statement. The argument which follows these lines arrives at an articulation of moral discourse which is "emotivist." Emotivists argue that at worst a moral statement is irrational, and at best we are left, in the absence of foundations for our moral statements, with radically incommensurable moral paradigms. We can begin by resolving factual disagreements, but having done that there may be no better way to resolve moral disagreement than to say "that's your opinion."

MacIntyre argues that the best remedy for this situation is a form of communitarianism. He argues that the greatest problem facing liberal institutions is their attempt to manage collective life in the absence of agreement on the good. Communitarian arguments focus less on the moral agent as an individual and more on the moral context into which an individual is socialised. This context informs the decisions the individual will make, although it is itself unchosen. MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment worldview has destroyed our understanding of "humanity as it would be in its best self" (our telos), and without such a unifying vision we have no basis from which to judge moral decisions. He argues that we must recover our telos if we are to resolve moral discussions and work towards genuine moral progress. MacIntyre's moral theory is helpful in the argument I am developing because he illuminates the difference between on one hand focusing on the individual as a moral agent, and on the

other examining the background against which moral decisions are made. He also offers an account of how moral agents can be active in the development of their moral tradition without being ruled by that tradition.

Lovibond proposes a response to "emotivism" which articulates the view of a moral realist. She argues that the ascendancy of realism in ethics indicates a turning away from individualistic values. Following Wittgenstein, she argues against the empiricist's dichotomisation of language into either expressive or descriptive statements. While rejecting a foundationalist epistemology, she argues that we can still rationally justify beliefs and actions. But we have to acknowledge that the process of justification is relative to a context and to the expectations of a particular audience. Objectivity and rationality are grounded in consensus, she argues, but like MacIntyre, she points out that being part of a tradition need not mean being ruled by it. Her argument maintains the seemingly contrary positions of moral relativism and moral absolutism. While there is no higher authority to resolve disputes between two opposing worldviews, there is also no logical reason why a person cannot be securely convinced that a particular worldview is the most adequate one and that opposing views are false. Lovibond also discusses the coercive authority which is always part of a person's initial education. The relationship between authority and education is one that will become important to the argument I am developing once I have offered my account of the role of strong objectivity in moral education.

Habermas shares important insights with both MacIntyre and Lovibond. Like MacIntyre, he argues that our sense of identity derives from our development as social beings, and like Lovibond he sees this social development originating in the development of communication. Habermas argues that the only way to gain objectivity is to distance oneself from the group; this is necessary before the individual is capable of moving beyond conventionally justified beliefs and actions. Following Kohlberg, Habermas argues that to have a principled morality one must use reason and principles to support normative claims. Unlike Kohlberg, however, he argues that monological reflection is inadequate for identification and justification of norms; public discourse is required. Habermas's discussion of what constitutes legitimate public discourse will be an important part of the argument I am developing. But Habermas is not arguing for a communitarian ethics; he maintains that appeal to valid criteria must go beyond the shared values of the community. It is not enough to say that a particular ethical system brings about a desired way of life as the pragmatists would have it; we have to look beyond to universalizable principles which can be rationally justified. This is the point where Habermas is most clearly defending the worldview which underpins positivism. MacIntyre, by comparison, would say that such universal agreement is only possible when there is a universally shared telos, whereas pragmatists like Putnam or Stout would argue that such universal agreement is neither possible nor required.

MacIntyre's Communitarianism

MacIntyre's moral vision is articulated in three volumes: *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, published between 1981 and 1990. MacIntyre argues that the problem with our current understanding of moral discourse is that it depends on the Enlightenment project which has dominated western thinking for the past three centuries. It has destroyed any conception of what it means to be a good person and replaced it with the view that rationality and free agency are independent of historical or social contexts and independent of humanity's nature and purpose. What is left is a moral discourse which is generally used to express disagreement and which has no adequate means of mediating most moral disagreements. When people argue from perspectives that do not share basic premises, there is no easy way to obtain moral agreement and there is no way to evaluate the strength of competing perspectives. We speak as if using self-chosen, impersonal criteria, but in fact we are using the concepts and the premises into which we have been initiated. This is particularly problematic when it comes to organising social institutions. Liberal institutions run into trouble, MacIntyre says, because they attempt to manage collective life in the absence of agreement on the good. The way to solve our problem, according to MacIntyre, is to develop an account of practical reasoning based on

communitarianism; that is, based on contextualising and historicising our moral concepts.

Communitarian accounts follow an Aristotelian tradition which presupposes that every type of item or event which it is appropriate to call good or bad, including persons and their actions, has, in fact, some given specific purpose or function. If it is true that such a purpose (telos) exists then it follows that to say something is good is to make a factual statement. To say that an action is good is to say that it is in keeping with the actions of a good person; this is also a statement of fact. Within this tradition, therefore, a moral or an evaluative statement can be called true or false in exactly the same way as can any other factual statement. But once our understanding of essential human purposes is removed, as has happened in the modern western world, it is no longer possible to treat moral statements as statements of fact. MacIntyre argues that because we lack a common understanding of our telos, participants in moral discourse often mistake their own particular vision of the good with an objective or universal one. Only once we have achieved a common understanding of our telos will we be able to engage in constructive moral discussions which are likely to lead to genuine moral progress.

In MacIntyre's view, rationality is understood to be tradition-dependent. This does not, however, lead to moral relativism, nor does it mean we cannot criticise our own traditions. The possibility of rational inquiry does not, he argues, depend on an Enlightenment conception of "pure" rationality divorced

from time and place. Rather, the communitarian position challenges us to undertake a dialectical or critical inquiry which is the best path towards moral progress. MacIntyre does not emphasise the status of the moral agent as a decision-maker. Rather, he emphasises that a person's identity is at least partly given in advance of decisions the person makes. According to MacIntyre, the central question of our moral lives is not, as he says liberals maintain, about which choices we ought to make, but rather a question about how we are to understand who we are, independent of and antecedent to our choices. As Horton and Mendus put it in the introduction to their book *After MacIntyre*, where

many forms of liberalism emphasise our status as choosing and deciding beings, MacIntyre draws our attention to the importance of the background circumstances and moral context which inform and make intelligible those choices but which are themselves unchosen. (Horton and Mendus, 1994, p. 9)

The concept of practice is central to MacIntyre's work. If morality is seen to develop within a tradition, it follows that practice and habit within that tradition inform the practice or the habit of making moral decisions. MacIntyre's understanding of practice allows him to conceptualise the good as not subjective in the sense of being personal or capricious, but also neither universal nor neutral. To do right, within this view, is not a matter of individual preference. It means to live the good life within a tradition. Practices are socially established and they are sustained by social institutions. The standards by which they are judged are intersubjective rather than objective.

Stout articulates a pragmatist response to MacIntyre. His main argument is that MacIntyre both under-estimates the amount of agreement we do have and at the same time over-estimates the amount we need to solve problems and make genuine moral progress. Moral discourse, Stout argues, is held together by a limited but nonetheless significant agreement on "the good." We do agree on at least a "provisional telos." Stout argues that the greatest problem with communitarianism is the utopian nature of its solutions. In the spirit of pragmatism, Stout responds to MacIntyre's "wistfulness":

> No one has trouble imagining a way of life that, by their lights, would qualify as an improvement on the current order. But it always turns out to be a way of life in which everybody, or nearly everybody, comes to see the light—that is, comes to see things by my lights, by light of my conception of the good in all its detail. If imagined utopias are to generate more than terminal wistfulness, we will need also to be able to imagine realistically how to achieve them by acceptable means, how to make them nonutopian. The main problem with communitarian criticism of liberal society, then, is its implicitly utopian character. (Stout, 1988 p. 229)

Lovibond's version of Moral Realism

In her book *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* Lovibond puts together a version of moral realism developed by Platts with a Wittgensteinian expressivist theory of language. These are argued in opposition to the "emotivist" arguments I referred to above which Lovibond refers to in the broader category of "non-cognitivist."

Non-cognitivists, as Lovibond describes them, argue that language has two functions; it can express truths and it can express attitudes. Attitudes, according to non-cognitivists, are logically unconstrained by facts. Statements which can be considered true must have some real knowledge set over and above the knowing subject. Because there are no such things as objective moral facts, according to this view there can be no such thing as moral knowledge. Platts' articulation of moral realism, on the other hand, suggests that there exists a realm of moral facts of which individuals can become directly aware. Lovibond calls his view a provocative form of intuitionism, which she says is at odds with most current understandings of "fact" and "objectivity" both on the part of trained analytic philosophers and those who are the "unhappy victims of empiricist common sense" (Lovibond, 1983 p. 12).

There are a number of elements of this articulation of realism which Lovibond finds attractive. She argues that the current ascendancy of moral realism indicates a rejection of the individualism or anti-authoritarian values exhibited in non-cognitive theories. It further indicates a rejection of the idea

that moral judgements manifest nothing more than our "passions." Non-cognitivist arguments tend to focus on more general categories of morality such as goodness and rightness and move from there to more specific moral instructions. They argue that because there is no way to achieve general agreement except in the vaguest way on things like goodness and rightness there is similarly no objective meaning for a more specific prescription like "don't be rude." Realists, on the other hand, tend to focus their arguments on more concrete ascriptions of value whose application is governed by impersonal criteria. Lovibond offers Foot's example of the concept of rudeness: this is a concept which must be used according to fixed criteria if it is to be used at all. Platts argues in a similar vein that more abstract concepts like "good" are logically derivative from moral concepts with a concrete descriptive content.

Empiricism, and the non-cognitivism which goes with it, entails an understanding of language as an instrument for the communication of thought. Further, empiricism involves a belief that all our evidence for the truth or falsity of our propositions comes from our senses. Moral realism, on the other hand, involves a rejection of the positivists' twofold classification of language into descriptive statements which pertain to the "objective world" and of which we can make judgements regarding their truth or falsity, and expressive statements which pertain to moral or aesthetic statements. Moral realism thus also refuses the associated distinction between cognitive and emotive meaning. This is where Lovibond's own thesis begins to develop. She develops a realist view of

morality which derives from the expressivism of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's view of language, in *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere in his later work, is homogeneous, or "seamless" in the sense that both the descriptive and the expressive functions of language pervade all statements. It is a view which does not dichotomise different regions of discourse (as, for example, descriptive or expressive) or different aspects of mental activity (as, for example, cognitive or emotive). Under this view, the descriptive function of language is understood to pervade all statements, whether they relate to moral or to scientific propositions. If something has the grammatical form of a proposition, then it *is* a proposition. The only way that an indicative statement can fail to describe reality is by not being true.

Similarly, the expressive function of language also permeates all propositions. This is entailed once we give up the empiricist idea that speech is a sort of "calculus" for expressing ideas which are already present in our minds. An expressivist theory of language involves the understanding that thought is embedded in a linguistic medium, and language is in turn understood to be embedded in a shared form of life. Fact and value are thus seen to "coalesce" and all propositions are understood to accommodate both. As Lovibond puts it, "We can say that 'value' is thus reabsorbed into the 'real world' from which the non-cognitive theories expelled it" (Lovibond, 1983, p. 27). Following Wittgenstein, Lovibond's epistemology is non-foundational.

The alternative to a theory which makes sensory evidence the

ultimate rational basis of knowledge is to renounce altogether (in

the face of its seeming incoherence) the idea that such a basis

is needed—to hold, in other words, that knowledge can "stand

without foundations." (Lovibond, 1983, p. 38)

The argument does not dispense with the need for rational justification of beliefs

and actions, but it implies that there is no absolute or rationally irrefutable end

point against which we can compare observations or theories, such as

conformity to sensory evidence or (in the moral realm) conduciveness to

maximum utility. Instead, justification is understood to be relative to a context

and to the expectations of an audience. Objectivity, both in scientific and in

moral knowledge, is nothing more nor less than sound judgement grounded in

consensus, or intersubjectivity at the least.

There are, in particular, two aspects of Lovibond's argument which will be

useful as I develop mine. First is her discussion of the coercive potential of

intellectual authority. Second is her argument regarding the means available for

resolving moral disputes between people who hold different worldviews.

Authority

Wittgenstein argues that language acquisition, which is intimately tied to the development of more complex thought, is always initially manipulative in nature; children have to be taught the words and grammar which are appropriate (correct) within their group. Becoming a competent participant in the discourses of the group requires internalising the rules and learning how to apply them in novel situations. The initiation only ceases to be manipulative when the internalisation is relatively complete. But, Lovibond argues, what is both historically and logically prior to a co-operative learning process is an operation in which coercion holds the central place (Lovibond, 1983, p. 56). Individuals are coerced by various types of sanctions to obey the linguistic rules of their community. But the community itself is never subject to the rules of a higher authority. The consensus of the community is its own highest authority. In relation to the community itself, then, as distinct from its constituent members, linguistic rules are not prescriptive but descriptive. (Lovibond, 1983, p. 57)

An argument similar to Wittgenstein's is made by Quine, describing what he calls a "pull toward objectivity." Quine's suggestion is that this "pull" is brought to bear on each individual during the process of learning language as a child. To communicate with others we have to learn to "regiment" our linguistic responses to sensory stimulation so that they conform to the way that language is used by members of our group. Quine gives the example of the concept of "square." Although different observers will each see a slightly different

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phenomenon, given their position relative to the square object, nevertheless they will each call it square if each one grasps the concept correctly. A concept is more objective, according to Quine, if more people will tend to agree on how to use it.

Lovibond notes three implications of this line of argument. First, acquisition of language is obviously a socialising process. We teach our children to be adult participants in our discussions by getting them to see things our way. A competent participant is one who no longer needs to be corrected or supervised. Second, in attempting to be objective we try to occupy a position as near as possible to the position of the "ideal observer." Obviously this cannot be because experience has shown us that one or another observational standpoint is more adequate for understanding reality. Rather, it is because reality is *defined* as the way things look from the position of the ideal observer. The ideal observer turns out to be the person of sound judgement, as determined by the community in question. This point will become more important when I look at how to resolve disagreement between different worldviews. Finally, the person who initiates a child or a student into the discourse, the person who exerts the "pull towards objectivity," is necessarily in a position of authority over the initiate. When a child is being initiated into the linguistic community, there is a more obvious relationship of authority between the child and the teacher. The "pull" for children is often material. Adults are still "pulled" however. Authority over adults may also be material but more frequently it is intellectual. Often the

norms implicit in a community's linguistic and other social practices are upheld by sanctions imposed by the community on deviant individuals. This authority will vary from context to context—it may be one's professional peers, one's social group, or newspapers and television reports which tell us what it is appropriate to believe and how to understand it. As Lovibond puts it, our aim in talking about the objective world is not to say something acceptable to the powers that be, but to say something true. If we held that no one could legitimately correct anyone else's judgements we could not think of what we said as being answerable to truth. This would leave us in the same position as the non-cognitivists (Lovibond, 1983, p. 61).

> Our proposed theory of ethics, in short, is a realist theory in that
> it asserts the existence of intellectual authority-relations in the
> realm of morals, whereas non-cognitivism denies these.
> (Lovibond, 1983, p. 63)

Being part of a linguistic community does not mean being ruled by it. It means inserting yourself into the historical process of using moral language.

Disagreement

The second important implication of Lovibond's argument is how to resolve differences between people from differing belief systems. Lovibond

reminds us that according to Wittgenstein, alternative belief systems, whether they succeed each other in time or co-exist in different places, cannot resolve disputes by recourse to a foundation or to a higher authority. From the view of an outsider, such systems do not even lend themselves to evaluative comparison in terms of truth, rationality, or moral worth. When a belief system is changing, when certain of its social practices are in flux, there may be a breakdown or a lack of consensus regarding the proper way to act or to think. The individual in this situation has a relatively greater amount of autonomy to decide, and this decision may set a precedent and have an impact on the developing consensus.

On the other hand, when two systems contradict each other, participants can engage each other rationally, each one attempting to convert the other to her or his own perspective. Any evaluative judgement regarding a particular worldview must be made from a particular standpoint; i.e., from within its own commitments to a worldview. As Lovibond says, the mere act of committing oneself to a (would-be) objective judgement already displays one's allegiance to certain intellectual authorities (Lovibond, 1983, p. 140). It seems at this point as if the Wittgensteinian perspective is no different from that of the non-cognitivists: since there is no moral position outside of its own commitments, there can never be a means to judge between two opposing positions. Given a dispute and no impartial judge, it is the more powerful disputant who will win.

Non-cognitivists resolve this issue by saying that empirical disputes are solved by consulting the higher authority which is the real world. In moral matters, non-cognitivists maintain that there is no higher authority and therefore no way to judge. Wittgensteinians respond by arguing that empiricism must be rejected because there is no deciding authority external to the linguistic community. Realism, both in the physical world and in the moral realm, can only be retained once we stop looking for such an authority.

The important difference between a non-cognitivist response and the one proposed by Lovibond is that the latter view does not place a participant to a dispute under any logical obligation to withdraw the claim of truth from cherished beliefs. I have frequently said to my students, "Of course I think I'm right; if I thought I was wrong, I would change my mind." As Lovibond puts it, "It makes perfectly good sense to assert of another person that he has failed to grasp the force of a valid argument against his own mistaken view" (Lovibond, 1983, p. 152). Lovibond shows that Wittgenstein's arguments encompass both relativism and absolutism. The relativist view is that such disputes must be understood as conflicts between partisans of rival theories for control over relevant social practices. The absolutist view is that no philosophical considerations can undermine my inclination to say that my theory is true and others are false.

Habermas and Discourse Ethics

In the two volumes which make up his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas offers a theory of moral justification in which public discourse is used to defend the validity of norms and thereby to resolve moral disagreement. Habermas argues that the only norms we can call valid are those to which all concerned people agree or would agree as participants in practical discourse. Habermas explains what it means to raise validity claims and how one must go about defending them, distinguishing between three "worlds" of validity claims. Cognitive claims are defended through objective criteria based on their truth; these correspond to "fact" claims about the physical world or scientific knowledge. Normative claims are those developed and accepted within a society by consensus; they are defended through social criteria based on their "rightness" which is negotiated through social and moral discourse. Finally, expressive claims are defended through subjective criteria; these are claims about the inner self and can only be judged according to their sincerity as demonstrated in narratives of character and self-reflection. The ability to distinguish between the three worlds, Habermas argues, is nothing more than the ability to distinguish between types of validity claims. It follows, therefore, that from an epistemic standpoint there is no difference between the kinds of arguments we use to justify truth claims and the kinds of arguments we use to justify normative assertions. Normative claims are analogous to scientific claims

insofar as both are defensible only by appeal to reasons accepted by the community.

Rationality

To understand his argument, it is important to understand both what Habermas means by rationality and what his rules are for legitimate public discourse. Following Mead, Habermas argues that we are not first individuals who become social agents only because of our decision to engage with others. Instead, Habermas understands identity to be socially derived and socially mediated. Language is the medium in which identity is constituted. Our rationality is inseparable from our identity.

For Habermas, rationality must be principled. Following Kohlberg, he argues that normative claims must be supported by reasons and by principles. Like Kohlberg's theory, Habermas's theory of communicative action is formal, cognitivist, and universalistic. It is formal in that the burden is shifted from the content of judgements to their form. Habermas is not interested to prescribe a particular content to social norms; one purpose of his theory is prescribe a method of discourse which will be more likely to lead to genuine communicative action. It is cognitivist in that moral conflicts are understood to be resolved by argument and as in Kohlberg's theory, it is understood that there are successive levels of competence in communicative action. Finally, it is universalistic in that Habermas claims that the form of reasoning at a given stage is identical in any

culture. But unlike Kohlberg, Habermas argues that monological rationality is not adequate; legitimate normative claims must be developed and defended through public discourse. Moral law cannot be determined by an individual.

Habermas uses the term rationalisation to mean the development of the internal logic of particular modes of societal action co-ordination. Habermas distinguishes between two kinds of societal rationalisation which correspond to two categorically distinct modes of societal integration, which he calls "lifeworld" and "system." The distinction is based on whether social co-ordination depends on or bypasses the consciousness of individuals in their capacity as agents.

In plain language, "lifeworld" corresponds roughly to the social or cultural context in which an individual acts. Lifeworld rationalisation takes place in the domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation. In the lifeworld, co-ordination of action takes place primarily by means of communicative action. System co-ordination, on the other hand, bypasses the action orientations of individuals. System rationalisation refers to co-ordination of actions oriented towards success. These may be instrumental, if they are non-social, or strategic if they are social. In other words, action co-ordination at the level of the system may involve instrumental action, which is non-social, or it may involve strategic action, which is social. So it is possible to identify two kinds of societal action co-ordination. Communicative action is action that is taken with the purpose of reaching understanding. Strategic action, on the other hand, is undertaken with the purpose of attaining a particular instrumental or

strategic goal. Communicative action is accomplished in the lifeworld, while strategic action is accomplished in the system. In plain language, communicative action involves engaging with other people in respectful and equitable ways. Strategic action, which is oriented to success rather than understanding, can result in treating other people merely as means to a goal.

Habermas moves from an account of the historical separation of lifeworld from system to an account of the uncoupling of the subsystems of economic and administrative activity from the lifeworld. This uncoupling eventually results in the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system (Cooke, 1994, p. 6). Habermas argues that in modern societies the communicatively structured spheres of the lifeworld have become increasingly subject to the imperatives of system co-ordination. This results in the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system.

Social action, according to Habermas, can either be co-ordinated by consensus, which is typically the means used within the lifeworld and corresponds to communicative action, or it can be co-ordinated through influence, which is typically the means used within the system and corresponds to instrumental or strategic action. Only communicative action has the potential for social resistance and ultimately for emancipation.

Habermas understands objectivity to be possible only when an individual is able to gain a measure of distance from the social group to resist the pull towards consensus. To gain the objectivity necessary for evaluating the norms of a social group, an actor must gain distance from particular social roles and

recognise that all roles are structured by shared social norms. This view corresponds to Kohlberg's post-conventional level of moral development where individuals are capable of moving beyond the group's view of what constitutes correct action. Only from the post-conventional perspective is it possible to question the norms of one's own group.

So, objectivity must be attained somewhere beyond the consensus of the group. Furthermore, Habermas argues that the legitimacy of norms must be grounded in justifiable, universalizable principles rather than in claims they bring about a desired way of life. Such objectivity is only possible under the specific conditions of discourse which Habermas outlines.

Public Discourse

The purpose of Habermas's discourse ethics, as Benhabib summarises them, is to "preserve the rational core of a normative claim, and resist assimilating it into a statement about the world (naturalism) or a statement about my own preferences (emotivism)" (Benhabib, 1989, p. 150). Moral justification amounts to a form of moral argumentation which follows the particular rules of legitimate public discourse, which Habermas names "D." Habermas appeals to Kohlberg, maintaining that D corresponds to the moral experience of post-conventional moral reasoning. This is the stage at which a disjunction occurs between "social acceptance" and "moral validity."

As Habermas presents it, egalitarian reciprocity is embedded in the very structure of communicative action. All communicative action entails symmetry and reciprocity of normative expectations. The two fundamental rules of D are first, that we ought to respect each other as beings whose viewpoint is worthy of consideration, and second, that we should treat each other as concrete human beings whose capacity to express this viewpoint we should enhance by creating, whenever possible, social practices embodying this discursive ideal.

Benhabib (1989) explains how rationality and freedom entail each other within Habermas's theory. She argues that a claim of rationality entails the belief that those to whom such a claim is addressed can be convinced that the claim is indeed rational. Rationality claims thus entail the possibility of free assent. Assent given under conditions which violate the free exercise of such assent cannot be deemed rational. She argues that if inegalitarianism is to be "rational," it must seek the assent of those who will be treated unequally, but to seek such assent means admitting "others" to the conversation. If these "others" can see the rationality of the inegalitarian position, they can also dispute its justice. Therefore, either inegalitarianism is irrational, that is, it cannot win the assent of those it addresses, or it is unjust because it precludes the possibility that its addressees will reject it (Benhabib, 1989, p. 153).

Habermas argues that by exchanging speaker and hearer perspectives we learn to justify claims of truth, or of authenticity. Thus, reciprocity is built into our development as communicative agents, and it is built into our understanding

of rationality. Benhabib acknowledges that many people consider Habermas's model hopelessly utopian, but she responds that the purpose of D is not to draw a blueprint for a well-ordered society. Rather, the purpose is to develop a model of public dialogue such as to demystify existing power relations and the current public dialogue which sanctifies them. Braaten (1995, p. 142) suggests that by defining the ideal consensus as one in which no point of view is excluded or arbitrarily discounted, Habermas points out that the confidence one has in being freely and openly convinced of the best arguments is also the basis of genuine social mutuality and trust, as well as that of democratic and just institutions.

Stout, while acknowledging that Habermas is a profound social critic, is one of those who, as Benhabib suggests, considers the Theory of Communicative Action hopelessly utopian. He argues that searching for the kind of "moral Esperanto" that Habermas wants is a waste of time. The problem with universal languages, Stout maintains, is that almost no one speaks them. Nevertheless, Habermas's project, as Benhabib argues, is useful in identifying those issues which are prevented from becoming public because of existing power constellations; in identifying those groups that have not had access to means of public expression and advocating their inclusion in the discourse of legitimacy; in distinguishing between genuine agreement and pseudo-compromises based on the intractability of power relations; and in saying what is in the public interest as opposed to the universalisation of what is only in the interest of a particular group (Benhabib, 1989).

Concluding Questions

The question of moral objectivity is central to the argument I am developing. My concern is to discuss the responsibility of a moral agent in discovering objectivity and acting to increase it within her or his community. These three theorists have differing views which nonetheless overlap in important areas. All three believe, in opposition to emotivist moral theory, that a person develops as a moral agent only in the context of a moral community, and that language, developed through initiation into a linguistic community, is the medium within which thought develops. Lovibond draws attention to the relationship between a competent participant in discourse and the initiate; this is a discussion I will return to in Chapter Five.

Lovibond and Habermas are both concerned with conceptions of objectivity and the means for achieving it. Lovibond is concerned to answer questions about what the objectivity of knowledge claims consists of. She argues that objectivity is discovered in the consensus of the community and that initiation into the group as a competent participant entails a pull towards what the community takes to be objectivity. Habermas has a different concern. He explores what the individual ought to do in order to maximise objectivity. He argues that objectivity can only be achieved when a moral agent is able to respond from a post-conventional perspective and see beyond the perspective of the group. In Chapter Four I will address these questions and suggest that

the pragmatist account offered by Stout is a responsible solution. I will revisit Harding's conception of strong objectivity and argue that a commitment to it can be a useful means of achieving a post-conventional distance. I will also take up the discussion Benhabib begins regarding the role discourse ethics can play in the development of a just community. I will argue that the ideal of strong objectivity can play an important role in the responsible development of such a community.

CHAPTER FOUR:

How to Work Towards Strong Objectivity in Moral Discourse and in Moral

Disagreement

In the preceding chapters I have offered the main premises of my argument. This chapter and the next will suggest the practical work I believe follows from a commitment to strong objectivity which can be used both in the development of a moral point of view, and in working as a moral educator. I argue in this chapter that commitment to the ideal of strong objectivity offers us both a means for undertaking the revision of our moral perspective and a set of standards according to which we can more responsibly understand and respond to alternative moral positions. It helps us gain the post-conventional distance from our own position that Habermas calls upon us to do, and it challenges us to listen to voices from the margins of a particular moral discourse.

Strong Objectivity Revisited

In Chapter One I argued that while the feminist standpoint theories do have important insights to offer with regard to knowledge production and the material position of the knower, they do not convince me that the position of the oppressed or marginalised voice grants epistemic privilege to the knower *because* of her or his marginality. Standpoint theorists argue that both the dominant position and the marginal position are partial; commitment to a given

worldview, which is a prerequisite to any inquiry, will put limits on what counts as knowledge. But standpoint theorists argue further that the marginal position is less partial; different standpoint theorists offer different reasons why this is so. Harding argues that the starting point of standpoint theories is that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such distinctions shaping the very structure of a society, the *activities* of those at the top both organise and set limits on what they can understand about themselves and the world around them (Harding, 1993, p. 54).

My argument, in summary, was as follows. First, we have to acknowledge that all knowledge is constrained by the material position of the knower, and an individual develops knowledge only in conjunction with the community to which she or he belongs. Second, people who have more power are in a better position to tell the world what their understanding of it is, through teaching, publishing, and related activities. People with less power therefore will possess their own understanding of a particular situation, but they may also learn the perspective of the dominant position. My point is that the position of less power does not itself generate a less partial understanding, but individuals who occupy such a position have access to both views and for this reason have access to a broader understanding of both the content of the knowledge and the social relationships which lead to the development of the claims. They are able to develop a broader understanding of the content of knowledge claims because they have access to both the claims of the dominant view and the claims made from their

own, marginal position. They have access to a broader understanding of the social relationships which lead to the development of knowledge claims because they can learn the explanations both from the position of the dominant group and from their own, marginal position. Because they see such relationships from both sides, they are in the best position to understand them.[7] This is important to the argument I am making because if the voices "from the margins" are likely to have a broader rather than a narrower understanding of the problem, an investigator has not only a moral but also an epistemological responsibility to draw those voices into the discourse.

Here is an example of what I mean. Within a graduate department, let's say, the faculty will advertise what they take to be the curriculum and they will discuss in committees the various forms and the content of this curriculum as it exists and as it is to be developed. The students may well have a different understanding of what they are learning, both on the level of the explicit curriculum and on the level of the implicit curriculum. The students will know what the faculty understand to be the explicit curriculum, but the faculty will be very unlikely to know what the students think, insofar as the students' view diverges from the "official" curriculum. To take this example a step further, among the students there may be very different understandings of the purpose

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[7] I am not arguing that the view from such a position will ensure the most complete understanding of the relationship. Harding writes, "The epistemologically advantaged starting points for research do not guarantee that the researcher can maximize objectivity in her account; these grounds provide only a necessary—not a sufficient—starting point for maximizing objectivity" (Harding, 1993, p. 57).

of various courses, exams, or related activities, depending on whether the student is male or female, is straight or gay, has the language of the university as a first language or has another first language, is a national of the country or is a foreign student, and so on. In every group of students that meets to discuss their department, there will be one or a few perspectives which everyone tacitly knows are more "legitimate"—and people whose understanding is different know to keep quiet.

As I discussed in Chapter One, standpoint theorists want to argue that the marginal positions grant access to "less partial" knowledge. The argument, at its root, is that a subordinate has reason to try to critically understand her or his superior's attitude and position, while a superior has reason not to question these things. In Chapter One I argued that there are also good reasons for someone in the subordinate position to resist a critical examination of the relationship. I argued that while it may be true that individuals in positions of relatively less power may have a broader range of insight, it is because they have access to both their own and to the other's, not because their own is epistemically privileged. The difference is subtle, but I believe it is crucial.

Despite my rejection of the basic premises of standpoint theory, I have argued that Harding's conception of strong objectivity offers us reminders of where to look for problems while maximising objectivity in the development of knowledge. It means looking not only within an argument to ensure that its premises are true and that its conclusions are responsible. It means also

looking outside the argument to the purpose it serves in supporting the .

surrounding elements of the perspective within which the argument arises.

Furthermore, it requires, as Harding puts it, placing the subject of knowledge on

the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge (Harding, 1993, p.

69).

Thus, strong objectivity requires what Harding calls "strong reflexivity."

Strong reflexivity calls for the subject of knowledge (i.e., both individual and

context/community) to be considered as part of the object of knowledge. In

practice, it means examining not only the knowledge claims which are made but

also who is making them and what the claim-maker's purposes are. This

program of strong reflexivity is a resource for objectivity, in contrast to the

obstacle that "weak" reflexivity has posed to weak objectivity. Harding writes:

> All of the kinds of objectivity-maximising procedures focused on
>
> the nature and/or social relations that are the direct object of
>
> observation and reflection must also be focused on the
>
> observers and reflectors—scientists and the larger society
>
> whose assumptions they share. (Harding, 1993, p. 69)

Harding argues, as a standpoint theorist, that a maximally critical study of

scientists and their communities can be done only from the perspective of those

whose lives have been marginalised by such communities. I will agree with

Harding on this point, and below I will relate this to Habermas's argument that objectivity requires post-conventional distance from the norms and conventions of the community. Harding argues, and I think Habermas would not disagree, that a commitment to strong objectivity requires scientists and their communities to accept democracy-advancing projects for scientific and epistemological reasons as well as moral and political ones. She uses the conception of democracy employed by Dewey: that "those who will bear the consequence of a decision should have a proportionate share in making it" (Harding, 1993, p. 71). Harding argues:

It is clear that not all social values and interests have the same bad effects upon the results of research. Democracy-advancing values have systematically generated less partial and distorted beliefs than others. (Harding, 1993, p. 71)

But that does not make the results of such research value-neutral. It will still be the thought of this era, making variously distinctive assumptions that later generations and others today will point out to us.

Pragmatism and Consensus

The pragmatist view of knowledge is important to my argument in two ways. First, pragmatists refuse to dichotomise facts and theories, and they

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therefore understand that knowledge is created by communities rather than by individuals. A discussion of the responsible development of "epistemological communities" (to use Nelson's term) will be central to the argument I am developing. Second, pragmatists refuse to dichotomise facts and values, and this ability to treat the justification of fact claims and value claims in much the same ways allows me to argue that strong objectivity is as valuable an ideal in the moral sphere, and for the same reasons that Harding calls for its use in the scientific world. It is appropriate, therefore, to revisit pragmatism and, in particular, the pragmatist understanding of consensus development.

The pragmatist view of knowledge, as I showed in Chapter Two, accepts that knowledge is created by communities rather than by individuals. Pragmatists argue that the shared nature of knowledge changes the way we should treat any idea of the correspondence between knowledge and reality. But Pragmatists do not adopt the position taken by standpoint theorists that a responsible description of inquiry must take into account the relationship between the material position of an inquirer and the theories and commitments such an individual brings to the act of inquiry. Pragmatists argue that knowledge is constructed by groups of people together, but stops short of suggesting that it is relevant whether the group in question comes from a position of relative privilege or relative oppression vis à vis other communities.

Nevertheless, Dewey argues, as I outlined in Chapter Two, that responsible inquiry requires a commitment to the democratic ideals of inclusion,

equality, and respect. My argument is, first that a responsible community of inquiry must act to include as many voices as possible and respect particularly those at the margins, and second that a community must treat every other community with respect. I believe that Putnam, for example, would agree, but what is missing from his account is an explicit recognition of the importance of the material position of various groups participating in the discourse. I am not, obviously, arguing that any sets of community standards must be accepted. In moral communities no less than in scientific ones different claims and different directives can and should be evaluated and either accepted or rejected. But, through a commitment to respect and to the reflexivity Harding links with strong objectivity, inquirers in both moral and scientific realms can responsibly evaluate both claims which seem foreign and criticisms of claims which might otherwise be taken for granted.

Putnam (1987) writes that while our concepts may be culturally relative in the sense that they are arrived at through the actions of our cultural group, it does not follow that they are simply "decided by culture." I argued in Chapter Three, following Lovibond, that when two systems contradict each other any evaluative judgement regarding a particular worldview must be made from a particular standpoint; i.e., from within its own commitments to a worldview. The mere act of making a judgement already displays one's allegiance to certain perspectival commitments and these commitments are themselves prior to any rational inquiry. As such they are not open to rational defence. Nevertheless,

as Lovibond argues, it makes perfectly good sense for me to say that someone else's argument is not valid or is based on faulty premises even if the person in question does not accept my judgement. Recognising that competing claims which flow from opposing worldviews cannot be resolved by recourse to either foundation or a higher authority does not place the participant under any logical obligation to withdraw that position. We have a responsibility to refuse the tempting pull towards relativism, not only because it does not help our own theories to grow, but also because it brings us dangerously close to dismissing challenging criticisms to our own worldviews by saying they are "just the opinion" of another community. Putnam says that we evaluate our theories, both scientific ones and moral ones, based on how well they serve us. Like our artifacts (he uses the example of the knife) we create better and worse theories only insofar as they suit our purposes to a greater or lesser extent. Like Lovibond, Putnam argues that at a certain point the rational justifications for our claims give out. At this point we must say, with Wittgenstein, "Here my spade is turned" (Wittgenstein in Putnam, 1987, p. 86).

So—we cannot resolve disagreement, whether it is moral or scientific, when it arises between worldviews which start from different fundamental commitments. And we cannot resolve such differences in commitments because the commitments are themselves not subject to rational disagreement. But we can nevertheless develop our own knowledge traditions more responsibly if we are willing to acknowledge the involvement of other voices. A commitment to

strong objectivity can remind us to acknowledge these other voices and to grant them appropriate respect. It cannot help us determine if they are correct; we still have the traditional tools of evaluation available for this. But it can help us resist the urge to dismiss them or to rationalise them away. The measure of our respect in practical ways is a difficult matter. Of course, genuine respect will normally result in new and more inclusive ways of treating the actual people who speak with the "voices" I have been describing. But a lack of evidence in real world for changes in attitude does not mean the change in attitude has not occurred. I will return to this in Chapter Five when I discuss the problem of ascribing "militant ignorance" to someone whose behaviour I judge not to conform to the attitudes or beliefs of which I hope to convince the person.

"Distance" and Objectivity

In Chapter Three I offered Habermas's argument to the effect that objectivity is only possible when an individual is able to resist the pull towards consensus that is applied by any community. The individual must gain a measure of distance to look back upon the community and make judgements. Habermas maintains that in order to be in a position to evaluate the norms of one's own social group, an actor must be capable of a Kohlbergian post-conventional level of reasoning, where it is possible to separate one's conception of "the good" (one's sense of moral validity) from the norms of the community and the desire for social acceptance. The means for evaluating such

norms is public discourse resulting in communicative action. Communicative action, as Habermas defines it, always has the goal of promoting understanding, and it entails both respect and egalitarian reciprocity. Habermas argues that rationality and freedom entail each other. While Dewey's position that inquiry and democracy entail each other is set in a different context, it is nevertheless in keeping with Habermas's argument. Harding maintains that democracy-advancing values have systematically generated less partial and distorted beliefs than have other values, and again her position is in keeping with these other two.

Habermas disagrees with the pragmatists over ways to measure the legitimacy of social norms. While Putnam argues that our best norms are the ones that work best for us, i.e., the ones that bring about for us the best way of life, Habermas argues that the legitimacy of norms must be grounded in justifiable, universalizable principles. I criticised the pragmatists earlier for not taking account of the importance of the material position of various groups participating in discourse. I would suggest a similar criticism of Habermas's theory: he does not take enough account of the variety of material positions represented within a community. Stout suggests that Habermas is utopian in his vision of ideal discourse. I would prefer to use the term idealist. In his ideal discourse participants treat each other with reciprocal respect. But actual participants in actual discourses are constrained by more power relations than even they themselves can understand. No actual discourse can function in the

manner of an ideal one. While Habermas does not suggest that it can, neither does he offer the kind of analysis of material positions that I believe is so powerful in the arguments of the standpoint theorists.

Strong objectivity, I would argue, offers us a means, not for overcoming the material position of participants in moral discourse, but for understanding and responding to these positions. It can help us gain the post-conventional distance we require to evaluate our own norms as Habermas calls upon us to do. It does this by requiring that we consider, in Harding's words, the subject of knowledge as part of the object of knowledge. What this means, as I conceive it in this context, is that the moral agent and the fundamental commitments of the moral agent be examined as closely as the moral claim or program. When we consider ourselves and our community as part of the objects of inquiry we are at the post-conventional level of inquiry for which Habermas calls.

A commitment to strong objectivity also requires us to take particular account of those voices at the margins of our discourse and to make a particular point of considering them with respect. As I suggested above, this will very often be evident in changes in the way the business of knowledge creation is carried out, for example, we will see changes in things such as resource allocation, physical space, and the manner and content of academic discourse, among other things. Strong objectivity reminds us that the position of the margin offers a greater vantage from which to view the arguments or claims at the centre.

Again, my argument is not that the marginal position is epistemically privileged, but that the voice at the margin is most likely to be bi- or multilingual.

A commitment to strong objectivity challenges those at the centre of moral discourse not only to listen to the voices at the margins but also to learn to take on the perspective[8] of those at the margins. Lovibond argues, without using the same language, that we have to be careful how far we take the kind of strong reflexivity for which Harding calls. Lovibond notes that both Quine and Wittgenstein maintain that if we throw out too much of our intellectual furniture at once, we cease to have a habitable world-view at all (Lovibond, 1983, p. 109). She says that we have to be cautious in our attempts to gain "distance" from the consensus of the group which, for her, constitutes objectivity.

> It is in fact a matter of experiment how much we have to
> "accept"—how far our "agreement in judgements" with other
> members of our community can be dismantled by critical thinking
> before we begin to be in danger of losing the sense of our own
> identity, or of ceasing to be able to occupy the position of a
> subject of judgement. (Lovibond, 1983, p. 203)

I agree with her that in practice individuals risk losing the "insider" view when they adopt an alternative view. But it seems to me that people can shift between

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[8] This is not always a change in moral perspective. It may entail a change in how we consider evidence, in what we consider to be worthy objects of inquiry, or any number of other things.

perspectives. It is not that their fundamental commitments change, but it is possible to understand and follow the logic of a perspective which stems from commitments which you either do not accept or would not prioritise in the same way. We use empathy or sometimes our own memories of earlier commitments to do this.

But Lovibond also argues, as I outlined in Chapter Three, that initiation into thinking is always at its beginning a coercive undertaking. It is worthwhile at this time reiterating her position. Language acquisition, which is intimately tied to the development of more complex thought, is always, in her words, initially manipulative:

> "We" are a body of people who have all been subjected, as
> children, to a basically similar process of training in the use of
> our native language. And this training is, at any rate in the initial
> stages, manipulative in character: it essentially involves the
> exercise of certain powers of control over the learner. To the
> extent that it eventually ceases to be manipulative, this happens
> because the learner comes in the course of his training to
> internalise the goal set before him by his trainers, viz. acquisition
> of a knack (or complex of knacks) of producing the same
> behavioural responses as other people in given circumstances.
> But what is both historically and logically prior to this sort of co-

operative learning process is an operation in which coercion has

the central place. It is in virtue of our having been subjected to

this original, coercive type of training that we can be said to

belong to a community which is bound together by a common

education. (Lovibond, 1983, p.55-56)

So, according to Lovibond, initiation only ceases to be manipulative once the

internalisation is relatively complete. I will discuss in Chapter Five ways in which

I think a responsible educator should deal with this, but here I would like to

suggest that strong objectivity can provide a means for students to respond to

this manipulation and, as they develop maturity and autonomy, to become more

competent to resist it (providing they are not indoctrinated by an unscrupulous

teacher—but this problem I will also save for the final chapter). The ideal of

strong objectivity challenges the inquirer, in this case the student, to consider

not only the content of moral claims but also the context in which they are held

and the context in which they were taught. For example, I believe that a

commitment to strong objectivity calls upon me, as a teacher, not only to offer

arguments in favour of gender sensitivity, multiculturalism, and related topics,

but also to explain my politics to my students as clearly as I can so that they

have a context for understanding the positions I am trying to persuade them to

accept. For their part, I believe that a commitment to strong objectivity requires

that my students resist dismissing out of hand arguments that stem from political,

moral or other commitments they do not share. Thus, a commitment to strong objectivity requires from both myself and my students the Kohlbergian post-conventional reasoning that Habermas calls for, and it also makes possible a responsible dialogue which is at the core of communicative action.[9]

Discourse and Objectivity

In Chapter Three I summarised a number of positive effects that Benhabib says result from the application of discourse ethics. Benhabib's views in this regard are very close to those of Habermas. I will repeat them now to show how strong objectivity offers a useful means for realising them. First, Benhabib says that legitimate public discourse is useful in identifying those issues which are prevented from becoming public because of existing power relations. A commitment to strong objectivity requires that those in power take account of the partiality of their view and recognise that the issues which focus on the lives of members of marginalised communities deserve no less attention than those issues which have an impact on them. Here is an example. A few years ago a lunch was held to mark the visit of a feminist scholar. There were a token number of graduate students (myself included) and a token number of men invited. The conversation ranged over a variety of feminist topics, including the

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[9] Of course, in the example I offer here I am considering adult students. A teacher of children has far greater persuasive power and is at a far greater risk of coercing students. It is a delicate matter of judgment for the teacher to decide how much of her or his moral/political perspective the children are capable of comprehending.

disappointing trend among young women to disavow feminist values and particularly to refuse to call themselves feminists. I was thinking about a friend of mine; a mother who does not call herself a feminist although to my eyes she exhibits all the values and most of the insights I associate with feminism. I offered the suggestion that my friend feels abandoned by feminism and feels that her decision to mother her children full-time is not granted respect from the feminist community. The response was, "Don't be silly, of course we do. Now, as I was saying..." I would suggest that the ideal of strong objectivity, employed consistently, would help to avoid such dismissal by requiring that the "agenda setters" take account of less fashionable or less powerful views. I am convinced that if my friend had been present at the lunch she would have remained silent. The legitimate public discourse Benhabib is calling for requires changing this type of dynamic. Strong objectivity offers a means for realising such a change, and it offers a set of standards or criteria for recognising the need for it.

Second, Benhabib argues that legitimate discourse is useful in identifying those groups that have not had access to means of public expression and advocating their inclusion in the discourse of legitimacy. The strong reflexivity that Harding argues is entailed by strong objectivity again provides a means by which to achieve this inclusion. Strong objectivity as a standard challenges us to attend not only to those arguments which fit into our constellation of beliefs, but also, and perhaps particularly, to attend to those which make us feel uncomfortable. It is easy to rationalise away claims which, if true, would cause

us to rethink some of our central beliefs. A commitment to strong objectivity calls upon us to treat opposing views and different worldviews with the same respect we accord our own. Those with relatively greater power should always represent those views which exist at the margins of our discourses, and when appropriate, to advocate for them even if they are less fashionable. It will be up to the individual to decide, in keeping with her or his own commitments, when such advocacy is appropriate.

Third, Benhabib argues that legitimate discourse helps us in distinguishing between genuine agreement and pseudo-compromises based on the intractability of power relations. In her article titled "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children" Lisa Delpit (1988) offers this example of a Black male graduate student who is also a special education teacher in a predominantly Black community talking about his experiences in predominantly White university classes:

> There comes a moment in every class where we have to discuss "The Black Issue" and what's appropriate education for Black children. I tell you, I'm tired of arguing with those White people, because they won't listen. Well, I don't know if they really don't listen or if they just don't believe you. It seems like if you can't quote Vygotsky or something, then you don't have any validity to speak about your *own* kids. Anyway, I'm not

bothering any more, now I'm just in it for the grade. (Delpit,

1988, p. 280)

To engage legitimately, we have to recognise the difference between assent and

silent resistance. Too often what passes for consensus is merely a silencing of

opposing views. Benhabib's formulation of Habermas's discourse requires that

we resist this. According to the ideal of strong objectivity, this would be

unconscionable.

Finally, Benhabib argues that legitimate discourse helps us to see what is

in the public interest as opposed to universalising that which is only in the

interest of a particular group. Delpit's paper concludes with a discussion of how

members of the more powerful community can listen to and *hear* the voices of

members of marginalised communities. She argues that such listening requires

opening not only our eyes and ears but our hearts and minds as well, because

we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our

beliefs. She continues:

To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a

moment—and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it

means turning yourself inside out, giving up on your own sense

of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the

unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is

the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else

and the only way to start the dialogue. (Delpit, 1988, p. 297)

Delpit is pointing to the same strong reflexivity for which Harding argues.

Legitimate public discourse requires a recognition of the power relationship even

when it is uncomfortable to acknowledge one's own privilege. Again, strong

objectivity provides both clues as to how to do so and a standard against which

to measure whether this reflexivity is being achieved.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which strong objectivity can

provide both criteria for recognising flaws in the development of one's own moral

perspective and a means for avoiding the perpetuation of such flaws. I have

argued that a commitment to strong objectivity helps us develop the post-

conventional distance which is required of a morally mature position. It does this

by reminding us to look beyond the content of our moral claims to the uses that

these narrower, more practical claims serve in realising a broader moral

perspective. Further, as a standard, it reminds us that our claims, whether

scientific or moral, serve moral and political purposes, so it challenges us to look

beyond what seems to be neutral or seems to evoke a consensus.

I have also argued that a commitment to strong objectivity helps us devise

strategies for developing the legitimate discourse for which Habermas and

Benhabib argue. It does this by reminding us of the partiality of our own position and calling upon us to consider alternative positions with respect. The ideal of strong objectivity reminds us not to dismiss less powerful or less fashionable claims, especially ones that are particularly troubling or challenging to our own view.[10] It reminds us to recognise the difference between assent and silent resistance. And it reminds us to notice the difference between what is in the shared public interest and what is only in the interest of a particularly vocal or otherwise powerful group.

Obviously, the development of a mature and responsible moral point of view is a prerequisite for legitimate moral education, but this alone is not enough. In Chapter Five I will discuss some of the practical activities which follow from a commitment to strong objectivity. I will discuss ways for a moral educator to acknowledge and respond to the power relationship that exists between a teacher and a student.

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[10] Of course, we also have to resist dismissing more powerful or fashionable claims, although this is a less common problem.

CHAPTER FIVE

Strong Objectivity and Responsible Moral Education

To be a good moral educator one must be a morally mature person. A moral educator must be well justified that her or his moral perspective is the most adequate one available. I have argued in earlier chapters that the ideal of strong objectivity provides a set of standards for assessing the adequacy of a theory or of a perspective in both the scientific and moral realms. In Chapter Four I showed how a commitment to strong objectivity can help a moral agent assess the adequacy of a given perspective, and nurture its development in responsible ways. In this chapter I will discuss the specific problems that may arise in moral education and the ways in which a commitment to strong objectivity can help to avoid or reduce these problems.

Moral Education

Legitimate moral education, as opposed to training in habits or indoctrination in dogma, requires two things. First, the educator must enable the student to develop existing rational capacities. This is part of any genuine education, of course, not only moral education. In Chapter Three I outlined Lovibond's argument that initial education is always coercive, but I will argue here that this coercion need not lead to indoctrination. Moral education must go beyond training students in moral habits and appropriate use of moral language.

Although initially this is how it will look, such training should be seen as only the first part of a child's moral education. In the second part of this chapter I will take up Lovibond's argument and discuss what I mean by indoctrination. The second requirement of moral education is initiation of the student into a constellation of moral knowledge, attitudes, and practices. For a young child, this means guiding her toward the paths used by the adults in her moral community. For an older student or adult, it means challenging him to adopt, at least at its most fundamental level, the moral perspective of the community into which he is being initiated.

The most useful thing strong objectivity has to offer moral inquiry, I argue, is an understanding of the partiality of one's own perspective and a means for seeing how a given perspective distorts one's perception. Strong objectivity offers a means for evaluating the adequacy of one's own perspective, as I argued in Chapter Four, and for comparing it to others' perspectives.

Perspective Shifting

Individuals can, and I argue we often do, shift between two or more moral perspectives from time to time in our lives. It may be that a person with a different view tells us a story or relates an experience that gives us insight and allows us for a moment to enter into that perspective. Alternatively, through discussion or argument we may be brought to the point of seeing the world through another's eyes. Sometimes this insight stays with us, in which case it

may be said that our perspective has changed. Sometimes, though, the shift is only momentary. We might forget the links between compelling arguments, or we might see flaws in an argument that we believed when it was first persuasively argued, or the change might be simply too radical for us to accept. We shift back. If the new perspective is not genuinely more adequate, then we might do well to relinquish it. If, on the other hand, it does hold insights that are superior to some of those in our old perspective, then we have a responsibility to incorporate those insights. This will mean altering our original perspective—perhaps broadening it or perhaps letting go of some elements. Because this process of learning from others' perspectives is central to revising and enriching our own, and because this revision and enrichment is an ongoing process, and because we can never know that we have a perfect understanding either of our own perspective or of the social constraints affecting it, it is the responsibility of a moral educator to be prepared at all times to undertake the revision I am describing. It is also the responsibility of a moral educator to make students aware of their own responsibility in evaluating the perspective being offered to them, and to undertake to revise their own when that is appropriate.

Moral educators, indeed any educators, not only have the responsibility to ensure that their perspective is the most adequate, they also must guard against disrespect or dismissal of perspectives that contradict their own. Particularly when groups of students engage in moral discussions, where there is more room for disagreement among students and more tolerance for disagreement,

teachers may become frustrated with what seems to be students' lack of willingness to agree. It is certainly true that some students disagree without having the best reasons to do so, but it is also true that in some circumstances it is the teacher who must revise a moral position in response to something that has been learned from the students.

At this point, I will introduce the term "militant ignorance." I think it is a useful concept for describing a certain type of resistance that teachers face. I also think it is worthwhile discussing it in some detail because I believe that teachers (as well as many others who engage intellectually but are unsuccessful in persuading) are often too quick to attribute militant ignorance to the one who refuses to agree or acquiesce. While this may seem a digression, I ask the reader to bear with me. The link to strong objectivity will be explained presently.

"Militant Ignorance"

First, I will take for granted that sometimes people are not willing to engage. This can happen between teachers and students or between any two people who are party to a discussion. I may pretend to engage while refusing to open my mind (I am not engaging but merely acquiescing), or I may be very clear in my resistance to engagement. This can be militant ignorance or it can be the result of refusal to engage based on morally sound reasons. I will return to this later.

But if two people do engage intellectually, it seems to me that there may be four results. (I will continue to use the language of teacher and student although I want to make it clear that I think the same thing can occur in any number of contexts.) (1) The two may simply agree. (2) They may simply disagree. (3) The student may disagree at first but later come to agree with the teacher, perhaps upon reconsideration of the argument, or perhaps as the result of some new evidence or superior logical consideration. (4) The student may agree at the time of the argument but later disagree.

This final possibility, (4), is the one I am most interested in here. It comes about, as far as I can see, in one of four ways:

(a) The student understands at the time of the argument, but later forgets parts of the argument and ceases to understand. The argument stops making sense.[11]

(b) The student was persuaded by the argument, but later thinks of additional evidence or superior logical considerations that force a reconsideration of the argument. The student now sees that the argument is not sound.

(c) The student realises (with a greater or lesser amount of conscious thought) that if the argument is sound, radical changes will be necessary to her life. She does not want to change her life, so she pretends the argument is unsound, or she pretends that she does not understand it, or she pretends that

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[11] Sometimes this is directed by self-interest beneath the level of full awareness described at (c) below.

she is justified in ignoring it for pragmatic reasons (I will offer an example of this below). After pretending to believe for a little while, she actually comes to believe and no longer has to pretend. This is "militant ignorance," as I conceive it. Genuine ignorance is different in that the pretence is not present at any stage. Militant ignorance may also exist, as I noted at the start of this section, when someone refuses even to consider an argument or investigate a situation when they have reason to believe that their commitments are in danger. Apart from being unwilling to change one's life, there may be other motivations for militant ignorance. Pressure from other students or friends might be important; either pressure not to challenge the commitments of the group, or pressure not to engage with the teacher at all. For younger students, there may also be pressure from parents not to adopt certain positions no matter what arguments are offered in favour of them

(d) The student understands the argument and agrees with it in principle, but sees the futility of the practical applications of the argument and so continues to behave, for pragmatic reasons, as though the argument were unsound. An example of this might be a student teacher who continues to grade his students even though he is convinced that grading is an unsound pedagogical tool both morally and practically. To someone else this may seem like an example of either (2) (the student disagrees), (4b) (the student agreed but has changed his mind), or (4c) (the student is militantly ignorant). My point

is that it is possible to agree with the argument but continue to grade anyway, or, to put it another way, you can agree in principle but not be moved to action.

Any intellectual engagement requires rational deliberation within a context of moral and/or prudential commitments. To pretend to divorce rationality from one's commitments masks the power of the commitments and is not entirely honest. As I tell my students, "It's the ones who pretend to be neutral that I want you to be most concerned about."

If you and I are disagreeing, we may also be disagreeing about which of the above processes is occurring. If I am the one trying to persuade and you are the one deciding whether to agree with me, I obviously have a certain level of commitment to my argument. I am not disposed to think it is unsound, and I am not disposed to believe that my arguments are not compelling. So I am less likely to believe that you disagree for good reasons (4b). I am more likely to think that you have not clearly understood me or not fully appreciated how compelling my arguments are due to some combination of my lack of clarity and your lack of familiarity with my argument (4a). If we continue to engage, and we continue to disagree, I will be less and less disposed to think it is because I am unclear or you are not familiar with my argument. It is possible that I may come to believe that you agree but have decided not to act on your belief for pragmatic reasons (4d), and I may approve or disapprove of your decision. More likely, though, I will see your lack of agreement as evidence of your militant ignorance which might arise either because you have decided not to engage or because

you have engaged and agreed with me but decided to ignore your reasons for agreeing. From your perspective, of course, it is I who am misguided, possibly as a result of my own militant ignorance.

Who can arbitrate this disagreement? We might call upon a host of "dispassionate" observers, but each of them will (if not before hearing the arguments, then certainly afterwards) reach a conclusion based upon her own commitments. None of these is necessarily in a better position than either you are or I am to judge. I am not arguing that there is no right answer, but simply that we must be very careful in our judgements regarding the extent to which our opponent is militantly ignorant.

I reach two conclusions from this. First, as a moral educator, I must keep a vigilant watch over my own militant ignorance, insofar as this is possible. I must examine my beliefs in relation to my fundamental commitments, and my actions in relation to both. This is a much more difficult task than examining other people, whether my colleagues or friends or my students, for examples of where their behaviour (as I perceive it) does not cohere to my commitments. I also think it is more morally responsible and more epistemologically responsible than the latter. A commitment to the ideal of strong objectivity challenges us to undertake this self-evaluation as teachers. It reminds us that while sometimes it is our students who are resisting our very sensible arguments, at other time it is we ourselves who are refusing to grow morally from the perspective to which we have become accustomed.

Second, and this follows from the last part of my first conclusion, what seems to be militant ignorance to me may actually be any combination of denial, lack of understanding, lack of energy to engage, and lack of power to act. I am not able to judge the extent of militant ignorance in anyone's mind except my own. (And I may not be very well qualified to judge there either!) In this context, strong objectivity works best when it is applied in aid of developing one's own position. It is dangerously tempting to try to use it against a perspective contradicting your own, but to do so would be not only ineffectual but counter to the spirit of respecting alternative positions. I do not mean to suggest here that one's own view is always at the mercy of any other that comes along. Being open-minded obviously does not mean being credulous. But the most we can do as educators is offer our students the best methods we have for developing a responsible moral position and the best example we can of how moral growth occurs.

Education vs. Indoctrination

Moral educators have a variety of methods available for challenging students to revise their moral positions; these methods may be more or less morally legitimate. Two things are required for the education to be morally legitimate, and they are the same things required for the conception of legitimate public discourse I described in Chapters Three and Four. First, the engagement must be free in the sense that the student is engaging rationally and is respected

as a person. This requires that the student not be indoctrinated. Second, the educator must have good reason to believe that the "conversion" is toward a morally superior view.

In Chapter Three I outlined Lovibond's argument that language acquisition, which is intimately tied to the development of more complex thought, is always initially coercive in nature. Children have to be taught which words and which grammar are appropriate within their group. Becoming a competent participant in the discourses of the group requires internalising these rules and learning how to apply them in novel situations. Thus, the initiation only ceases to be coercive when the internalisation is relatively complete. But an initiate who is indoctrinated never escapes the results of this coercion. An indoctrinated person's will is never directly overridden. Instead, the person believes something and thinks that he has chosen to believe it. It is not possible to avoid coercion in initial moral training—you teach a child that certain behaviours are acceptable and certain others are not. Hopefully, as the person matures he becomes more and more capable of questioning early teaching. The core linguistic concepts obviously cannot be questioned; one would lack the language to do so. Similarly, fundamental moral commitments can only be questioned and defended in relation to each other. A commitment to racial equality makes sense only in relation to a commitment to equality or to respect for humans, and these in turn make sense only in relation to each other or to other commitments. But what students can question as they mature is the relationship between such

commitments and the actions that follow from them and are justified in relation to them. There can be a variety of arguments about what course of action is entailed by a given commitment or set of commitments. Students can question spurious arguments which erroneously link certain commitments.

Consensus

I argued in Chapter Four that we cannot resolve disagreement, whether it is moral or scientific, when it arises between perspectives which start from different fundamental commitments. We cannot resolve such differences in commitments because the commitments are themselves not available for rational defence. They can be explained or discussed, but there are no rational arguments which will persuade someone to change such commitments. We are initiated into them together with all of our concepts. There is no way to choose rationally between competing fundamental commitments, but an understanding of strong objectivity offers a means for understanding why we hold the commitments we do.

An understanding of intersubjectivity and of consensus is central to the conception of objectivity with which I am working. Lovibond argues that consensus is the same thing as objectivity—that it is the highest objectivity available to us. Habermas argues that we must gain a certain distance from the unreflective consensus of our group to achieve objectivity, and a means for doing this is public discourse which includes as many participants as possible.

The problem, I believe, is in two different uses of the term "consensus." "Bad consensus" is the kind that Habermas wants to avoid or move beyond. It is associated with universalising what is in the interest of the dominant group and arguing until everyone who does not agree is quiet. It looks like consensus, and it looks as if it comes about through co-operation, but it obviously does not maximise objectivity, nor would Lovibond suggest that it does. This "bad consensus," I believe, is what Habermas wants us to develop beyond, and I have argued that strong objectivity gives us a means for doing so.

"Good consensus" on the other hand, the kind that Lovibond equates with objectivity, requires both identification with the perspective of one's group (and, as I have argued, it is impossible to proceed with any investigation at all in the absence of such a perspective) and also the ability to step beyond the group's perspective and look back upon it to evaluate it. Lovibond does not use the language of post-conventional moral reflection that Habermas does, but she discusses the difference between being part of a linguistic community and being ruled by it. She argues that we must insert ourselves into the historical process of using and therefore developing our moral language. It seems to me that the most important type of moral judgement we have available to us from the post-conventional perspective is not the ability to "dispassionately" evaluate between competing moral commitments; rather, it is the ability to match the practices of our community with the commitments we hold. This will often require noticing the ways we typically rationalise (I am using the term with its more common

English negative connotations, not in the sense in which Habermas uses it) the disparity between what we say we believe in and how we act. Achieving "good consensus," in the way that I am using the term, does not mean going along with the way that people around you talk and act; it means adhering to the commitments into which you have been initiated by your moral community and pointing out the inconsistencies between these and the way you might be tempted to talk or act. A commitment to strong objectivity helps us to notice ways in which our perception of these rationalisations might be cloudy, and it reminds us to continue to search for others' perspectives in illuminating such discrepancies. A commitment to strong objectivity invites us to challenge our own privilege and to share power in the development of our moral community. This might mean, for example, learning from or at the very least listening respectfully to the perspectives of students or other less powerful voices.

Practical Suggestions

Moral educators have the responsibility of challenging their students to revise their moral perspectives. I have argued that to do this in a morally legitimate manner, teachers must engage their students rationally and treat both them and their views with respect. I would like to offer a few practical suggestions for challenging students to revise their moral perspectives. I am not aiming these suggestions at students of a particular age or level. I believe that

what I am suggesting could be developed in more curriculum-specific ways. My intention is to offer general guidelines only.

First, moral educators can encourage students to elaborate and clarify their fundamental commitments. Although, as I have argued, these are not subject to rational defence, each person can describe them and can decide if they cohere to the commitments of the moral community to which she belongs. In some ways this is a similar strategy to the "values clarification" exercises proposed by Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1978) among others. "Values clarification" approaches to moral education arose from a desire to avoid indoctrinating students, and they therefore focused only on articulating values and not on defending them. The strategy was criticised on the grounds that students were never encouraged to re-evaluate their own positions, and it was easy for them to dismiss others' as "just your opinion." My suggestion is to employ the strategy of encouraging students to articulate their values, by which I mean their very practical statements about appropriate moral behaviour. From here, a teacher can direct students to work backwards to the fundamental moral commitments which underpin their moral behaviour. A commitment to strong objectivity can help students to recognise discrepancies between what they say they believe and what their actions seem to demonstrate about their beliefs. It does this by challenging students to recognise what is motivating their action and to attend to the observations others offer regarding how their behaviour is perceived. It can also remind them to listen to their peer's values with respect,

and to be prepared to engage with others' views in a public discourse of the kind I described in Chapter Four. So, for example, in a class which may otherwise be dominated by a small group of students who are capable of silencing or dismissing views which contradict theirs (a number of likely candidates for membership in this group come to my mind, but I will let the reader decide who to imagine), a commitment to strong objectivity would require avoiding both. In a class full of students who are all committed to strong objectivity, discussion will be respectful and participants will engage intellectually with each other in the full sense of putting their commitments (occasionally and temporarily) to the background in order to understand those of their colleagues.

Beyond encouraging students to consider each others' views, a moral educator can engage with a student using the language and commitments the student uses, and then offer arguments which are slightly more sophisticated than those articulated by the student. This is similar to the strategy of "+1 reasoning" suggested by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) for use within Kohlberg's understanding of the development of moral reasoning. Kohlberg's theory is firmly rooted in a Piagetian understanding of stage development, and as such, the concept of "+1 reasoning" is defined as reasoning which is exactly one stage beyond that from which a student operates. What I have in mind is far less dependent on a rigid understanding of stage development or of the means of fostering the disequilibrium Piaget says is the necessary prerequisite for development to the next stage. I am merely suggesting that a teacher can offer

different ideas or different means of articulating the student's ideas which are new and intellectually challenging. Stories and examples of situations that the student has not considered are good places to begin. With a commitment to strong objectivity, the teacher may have a better idea of where to look for "blind spots" the students may have, remembering, of course, the danger I suggested earlier of making assumptions about the student's moral perspective. A commitment to strong objectivity also gives the students incentive to consider the teacher's alternative viewpoint fully before rejecting it.

Finally, a moral educator can point out, or encourage students to notice contradictions between the commitments to which a student adheres and the way communities are run. For example, if in a classroom there is general agreement that we are committed to equality, it is responsible to ask how many of our practices are consistent with this commitment. What does a commitment to equality require? How far in that direction are we as individuals or as a community willing to go?

Conclusion: Responsible Moral Education

I suggested in my introductory chapter that every teacher is a moral educator and that to be a responsible moral educator requires two fundamental things. First, a responsible moral educator must nurture the student's developing moral sensibilities. This entails preparing students to take their part as competent adults in the life of their moral communities. It means initiating

students into the constellation of moral knowledge, attitudes, and practices (including critical practices) accepted by the adult community of which they will be a part. It also means setting an example and encouraging students to accept the challenge to be vigilant in ensuring that the moral positions they adopt are the most appropriate ones available. Furthermore, it entails refusing to indoctrinate the student because the development of the student's rational autonomy is a necessary part of that student's moral development. Second, a responsible moral educator must strive to make sure that the moral perspective which the teacher offers as an example to the student is the most responsible one available. So moral educators need a method for judging the adequacy of their own moral perspective and of comparing it to others.

I have argued throughout this thesis that the most useful insights that strong objectivity has to offer moral inquiry are an understanding of the importance of acknowledging the partiality of one's own perspective and a means for seeing how a given perspective distorts one's perception. I have shown that the ideal of strong objectivity, as Harding employs the concept, both offers a set of standards towards which we can strive, and suggests means for working towards these standards. I have argued that strong objectivity offers moral educators criteria against which to compare the adequacy of their own moral perspective, and that it suggests ways to ensure the responsible development of one's own moral perspective.

Chapters Four and Five set out the main points of my thesis; specifically, the ways in which I believe a commitment to strong objectivity can help in the development of a moral point of view and can help a moral educator decide how to act. I argued that a commitment to strong objectivity offers us a standard according to which we can more responsibly understand and respond to alternative moral positions, and reminds us of where to take practical action for undertaking revision of our moral perspective. It helps us gain the post-conventional distance from our own position that Habermas calls upon us to do, and it challenges us to listen to voices from the margins of a particular moral discourse. This solves the second part of my initial problem: that moral educators need a method for judging the adequacy of their own moral perspective and of comparing it to others. The ideal of strong objectivity provides the basis of that method.

I further argued that strong objectivity offers moral educators the means to avoid or overcome a number of problems which might arise during their work. Because of the inequality of the relationship between a teacher and a student, and because moral education is always initially coercive in nature, moral educators must vigilantly avoid attempts to indoctrinate their students and must work against the tendency to dismiss students' contrary positions or accuse students of militant ignorance. Moral educators can provide the best possible example of open-minded inquiry, and they can initiate their students into the kind of legitimate discourse for which Habermas argues. This resolves the first part

of my initial problem: that moral educators must nurture the responsible development of their students' moral sensibilities. With a commitment to the ideal of strong objectivity, educators have a standard against which to assess techniques, and are reminded of pitfalls to avoid.

In Chapters One, Two, and Three, I offered evidence for my conclusions. In summary, my premises were as follows. (1) While it is misguided to believe that the standpoint of the oppressed grants access to a position of epistemic privilege, nevertheless there are both moral and epistemological reasons to attend to arguments which arise from less powerful or less fashionable perspectives. (2) In the development of scientific knowledge, Harding's conception of strong objectivity is an ideal against which we can usefully evaluate an existing program of research. (3) It is appropriate to treat scientific knowledge and moral knowledge in the same way to evaluate the adequacy of a paradigm and to choose appropriate means for knowledge development. (4) Knowledge, both moral and scientific, is developed not primarily by individuals but by epistemological communities. An understanding of knowledge development therefore requires an understanding of the social context in which it exists. (5) Initiation into a moral community is always initially coercive in nature.

I suggested at the outset of this thesis that the process of learning from others' perspectives is central to revising and enriching one's own perspective, and this revision and enrichment is an ongoing responsibility. I am convinced, and I hope I have convinced the reader, that through the application of strong

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objectivity to moral theory building, a moral educator can be justified in believing that her or his own moral perspective is the most adequate one available. I am also convinced, and I believe I have shown, that if a moral educator understands Harding's conception of strong objectivity, and embraces it as an ideal, the result will be a more justly equitable learning environment and a more complete understanding of the moral perspective which is being developed within the classroom. I will reiterate that these are fundamental to the legitimacy of the work of a moral educator.

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